

In the Shadows of the Past:  
Exploring Moments of Identification with Christ in the Works of Anne Duden,  
Margarethe von Trotta, and Anne Karpf

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## ABSTRACT

SARA FARNER BUDARZ: In the Shadows of the Past:  
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This work explores moments of identification with Christ, through the imagery of the crucifix and stigmata, in the works of Anne Duden, Margarethe von Trotta, and Anne Karpf. I argue that these moments of identification are pivotal for our understanding of the process of identity formation within a post-Holocaust society. Through extensive analysis of the Christian imagery in the works, I maintain that Christ is configured as a rebellious leader, advocating radical social change, and that by identifying with Christ as rebel, the narrators are able to re-evaluate their identity and establish themselves as active agents with society.

To my family, for their unwavering love and support,  
and especially to my husband Jeffrey, for sharing this beautiful life with me.

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## INTRODUCTION

In 1984, Michael Schneider, in addressing what he saw as the melancholy of his generation, posed the question, “Is it possible that this present is not livable because of the fact that it is still in the shadow of a sinister past?” (4). His question continues to resonate in the discussions of second-generation experiences, especially in regards to the feeling of being weighed down by the inherited guilt with which the second-generation perpetrator children have been imbued. Yet while Schneider exercises a strong critique of what he regards as the second-generation’s “self-pitying account of their own losses” (43), the phrasing of his question mirrors the exaggeration of emotion which he purports to disdain. Of course one *can* live in the shadows; it is not a life and death question any longer, as it was for their parents’ generation, who experienced the war and National Socialist genocide firsthand. Instead, the question that deserves to be addressed is not whether the present is livable, but rather: *How* does one live within the shadows of the past? How does a strong sense of identification with the past affect an individual’s development of identity? Lastly, what images do second-generation authors employ to confront the shadows of their past?

In order to address these questions, it is my intention to examine the works of three female authors of the second-generation: Anne Duden’s short story “Der Übergang”, Margarethe von Trotta’s film *Die Bleierne Zeit*, and Anne Karpf’s memoirs *The War After: Living with the Holocaust*. The reason for selecting these particular texts

lies in their complexity; each text in isolation explores the questions of how one lives in the shadows of the past and calls upon vivid imagery to aid in addressing this question. But in viewing all of the texts together, we are able to gain a sense of what common themes emerge and examine to what end they are being used. The selection of texts also represents a spectrum of mediums and therefore creates an interesting juxtaposition between a short story that blends fiction and autobiography (Duden), a film that is divorced from the author's experience but is loosely based on historical events (von Trotta), and an autobiography (Karpf). The authors themselves also come from varying backgrounds and therefore provide a more complete view on living life *in the shadow of the past*, with Duden and von Trotta representing second-generation perpetrator literature and Karpf representing second-generation survivor literature. Caroline Schaumann, author of *Memory Matters: Generational Responses to Germany's Nazi Past*, argues for literary analysis that pulls from a wide range of styles and backgrounds, arguing that "only in juxtaposition do similar allegories, literary references, narrative structures, and comparable approaches to memory become visible" (5). In examining these three texts, I intend to address the questions listed above as well as closely examine a common element found in all three works, namely the literary device of identification with Christ.

By examining the Christ motif, I intend to show how the use of a shared symbolic figure provides a common language through which these authors are able to reevaluate their identity and establish themselves as active participants of their generation, rebelling against the normative silence of the first generation, a phenomenon Schneider describes by saying that between the two generations, "there was a lack of genuine conversation in every respect and with regard to everything" (26). Furthermore, in examining the image

of Christ in the texts, I hope to show how the authors appropriate the same figure, yet do so for notably divergent purposes. Learning to recognize and interpret the imagery of the texts helps us gain a more complete understanding of processes of identification that are taking place, allowing insight into how these identifications influence the identities and actions of the individuals.

As mentioned, Anne Duden, Margarethe von Trotta and Anne Karpf are all members of the second-generation, defined as the generation of children born in the aftermath of World War II, who did not experience the war yet are indelibly marked by its legacy. While the term *second generation*, coined by Alan Berger, originally only applied to the children of survivors and was used most frequently in the realm of psychology, its use has been broadened to include children of perpetrators as well.<sup>1</sup> While not all agree with the shift, many have utilized this broader definition, including Sigrid Weigel and Erin McGlothlin, and thereby set the precedent for continuing this tradition. McGlothlin, in her book *Second-Generation Holocaust Literature*, argues for the validity of the term's broader definition, saying:

Although the ways in which the Holocaust was experienced by the parents and therefore the legacy transmitted to the children are quite different for the two groups, the general positions of the children to their parents' pasts are quite similar: both groups feel marked by the Holocaust, an event that is ever present in their lives but not personally experienced, and both struggle to understand their own place in the world in light of their link to the traumatic past. [...] Despite the gulf that separates the legacy of perpetration from the legacy of survival [...] the children of survivors and the children of perpetrators are like two sides of the same coin, for they both must confront the aftermath of an event that they have not experienced. (14-15)

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<sup>1</sup> For a review of the term second-generation, see McGlothlin, page 16-20. For first use of term, refer to Alan Berger's *Children of Job*.

A distinction in how this identification with the past is perceived varies, however, between the children of perpetrators and those of survivors. Children of survivors inherit their “parents’ wounds, or more precisely, they inherit not the wound itself [...] but the mark of the wound, the signifier for an experience not personally experienced” (McGlothlin 9). They are forced to “mourn the dead” (24) and attempt to come to terms with their inherited legacy of suffering. On the other hand, perpetrator children suffer from an “internal lesion” (McGlothlin 9) of guilt, not for crimes they have committed, but for the crimes of their parents. As McGlothlin argues, their guilt is analogous to “biblical, even mythical notions of inherited guilt and punishment” (18), in which the children are “born into a state of disgrace” (25) because of the actions of their parents and “despite continual attempts by postwar German society to forget and move past it, it remains an ever-present problem that binds the children of perpetrators to their parents’ crimes” (26). Guilt, in this context, is then defined as the inner turmoil caused by their knowledge of their “legacy of violence and violation” (9) for which they are held responsible because of their parents’ refusal to accept responsibility. Both survivor and perpetrator children thus experience life with a mark of the past, in which “the signifier remains, but it is unable to locate its referent, resulting in truncated relationships between experience and effect. For the children of survivors, this experience is one of unintegrated trauma and rupture in familial continuity; for the children of perpetrators it is the family’s unintegratable history of violence and brutality” (10). It is this notion of inherited history that will be discussed further in the individual chapters.

Use of the term *second-generation* is purposefully employed to avoid the use of *Väterliteratur*, the term originally used to describe the literature of the children of



perpetrators. As the term implies, *Väterliteratur* places the primary focus on the relationship between father and child and on the child's attempt to come to terms with the father's Nazi past, "to make the belated attempt to fill in the gaps in the life histories of their parents" (Schneider 4). There are several reasons for my avoidance of this term: First, the ideology underlying the term is worrisome in that it distracts from the centrality of the Holocaust and posits that the *shadow of the past* is primarily a family conflict needing to be resolved. As McGlothlin explains, "rather than concentrating on contemporary Germany's connection to its Holocaust past as the primary object of inquiry, [*Väterliteratur*] sees the past only as it is manifested in the authoritarian figure of the father. [...] Memory of Holocaust perpetration is displaced by family conflict and thus risks disappearing in a euphemism that erases the magnitude of the event by reducing it to a mere battle between father and child" (19). She goes on to say that "in contrast to the term second-generation, which stresses the idea of genealogical regeneration and inheritance between generations and beyond, *Väterliteratur* posits the engagement with the Holocaust past as a one-time conflict within the family" (18), much as Schneider argues that authors of *Väterliteratur* should in fact be referred to as "the generation damaged by its fathers" (4). Thus, I would argue that the term *Väterliteratur* does not adequately describe the works of Duden, von Trotta or Karpf, as the conflicts of the texts are not primarily located within the family. Rather, their concern with the past is figured in a broader sense: they move beyond attacking the father and address social issues, always keeping the centrality of the Holocaust in mind. Their struggles cannot, and should not, be relegated solely to the realm of the family.

Another problem with the term *Väterliteratur* is the privileging of the male, ignoring the roles of the mother and the daughter. While scholarship has traditionally overlooked women's roles in addressing the Holocaust, either by not distinguishing women's experiences from those of men in the case of survivors, as Caroline Schaumann notes in *Memory Matters* when she states that, "until the mid-1980s, female experiences of World War II as victims [...] were generally not distinguished from men's experiences" (6). From the perpetrator's perspective, "the myth [was perpetuated] that National Socialism had been a predominantly male affair. [...] While the myth [that women have an affinity for peace] served to exculpate women from the charge of having been perpetrators, it also excluded them from the postwar debates" (8). While my research will not explicitly focus on gender within the texts, it does argue against the exclusion of women in the debate and refuses to relegate memories of the war to the domain of men, as Ruth Klüger in *weiter leben* sarcastically suggests that society does when she says that: "Kriege gehören den Männern, daher auch die Kriegserinnerungen. Und der Faschismus schon gar, ob man nun für oder gegen ihn gewesen ist: reine Männersache" (10). Rather, much as the title of Elly Geiger's essay proclaims "Die Geschichte Deutschlands ist meine Geschichte!", my argument proceeds with the understanding that the responsibility for addressing history and the Holocaust lies equally with all, regardless of gender. Geiger stresses this point when she says, "die Antworten, die ich kenne, reichen nicht aus. [...] Ich lebe mit Menschen, die denken, daß das, worüber man nicht spricht, auch nicht existiert. [...] Das Schweigen über den NS, die heimlichen Botschaften unserer Eltern, das *Nicht-fertig-Werden-Können* mit unserem Land und dessen Geschichte steht für uns immer wieder auf der Tagesordnung" (349).

In his essay “Was bedeutet: Aufarbeitung der Vergangenheit” Theodor Adorno observes, “Man will von der Vergangenheit loskommen: mit Recht, weil unter ihrem Schatten gar nicht sich leben läßt, und weil des Schreckens kein Ende ist. [...] Mit Unrecht, weil die Vergangenheit, der man entrinnen möchte, noch höchst lebendig ist. Der Nationalsozialismus lebt nach” (555). It is precisely this feeling of a continued presence of the Nazi past that Duden, von Trotta, and Karpf experience in their lives and attempt to address in the texts. They are “marked by the unlive Holocaust past” (McGlothlin 7) and in order to address these *markings*, all three authors appropriate the use of identification with Christ. Having both survivor and perpetrator children draw on the same set of images is intriguing, and I would argue that our ability to understand the processes of identification and the results of their identification in the texts depends on our ability to recognize and examine these moments of symbolic identification with Christ.

Yet in discussing Christian imagery in regards to the second-generation, the potential exclusion of the Jewish voice needs to be addressed. Stephan Braese, in his book *Die andere Erinnerungen: Jüdische Autoren in der westdeutschen Nachkriegsliteratur*, rightfully argues that the Jewish voice has been largely ignored in the German context: “Juden kommen in der deutschen Literatur nach 1945 eigentlich nicht vor. Hingegen mag im Blick auf die deutsche Nachkriegsliteratur um so mehr die Zahl jener Werke auffallen, die sich um eine Auseinandersetzung mit Nationalsozialismus und Shoah bemühen” (9). While he notes that a “verstärktes Interesse an Juden und Judentum” (19) began in the 1980’s and continues to grow, any discussion of the Holocaust should take precautions not to repeat this error of omission.

The question that then arises in my research is whether the use of Christian symbolism in addressing the *shadows of the past* is in fact repeating this mistake? While certainly a concern, several factors speak for a validity of its use in the framework that the authors construct. First, I would argue that the Christian imagery being appropriated is devoid of any theological framework and is instead used as a symbol of rebellion, thereby transcending religious boundaries. Support for this is found in the fact that Karpf, a Jewish author, appropriates the Christ motif, indicating the image's ability to transcend traditional boundaries. Second, in the historical context, Christ was Jewish and did not place himself outside of Judaism; the creation of Christianity took place after his death. While the religious institutions have historically appropriated his life differently, the argument could be made that, apart from theology, his background aligns him with the Jewish tradition. Finally, the aspects of Christ's character and life which are appropriated by the authors speak to their rejection of the traditional reception of Christ, for in him, they see a rebel and agent of change. Taken outside of the context of theology, I argue that Christ was a rebel. He actively breaks rules and social norms in order to advocate social change. He points out the outdated nature of many laws, actively breaks them, and encourages others to do so as well.<sup>2</sup> He is accused of vandalism<sup>3</sup> and blasphemy<sup>4</sup> and disregards the traditions of society, arguing that a break from tradition is needed.<sup>5</sup> Christ was politically and socially subversive and I will argue that it is this aspect of his character that the authors under review are appropriating, which is drastically different

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<sup>2</sup> See John 8: 3-13 (argues against laws of punishment), Luke 6: 7-11 (breaks Sabbath laws), see also Mark 2: 23-28, Luke 13: 12-16.

<sup>3</sup> See Luke 19: 45-46 (vandalism of the temple).

<sup>4</sup> See Mark 2: 23-28(calls himself Lord), see also Mark 14:62, Luke 22:70, John 8: 58-59, John 10:30.

<sup>5</sup> See Luke 5:13 (breaks cleanliness norms by touching lepers, socializing with outcasts and gentiles).

than a traditional reading of Christ. Importantly, this construction of Christ emphasizes his agency: Christ is not a victim of society; he actively chooses his agenda of suffering. Emphasizing Christ's agency also demonstrates Duden, von Trotta, and Karpf's refusal to adhere to prior depictions of Christ, which have constructed him as an anti-Semitic figure and which have caused Jews to be blamed for his death. Understanding Christ as an agent makes clear the irrationality of the argument, for nobody is to be blamed for his death; he chose it. We see this clearly demonstrated when he states that: "No one can take my life from me. I lay it down of my own accord" (John 10:18). Appropriating the image of Christ as agent, not victim, allows the Christ motif to be used without claiming any form of victim status. The main characters of the texts may experience suffering, but I will argue that they suffer as agents and are not implying a connection with the suffering experienced by victims during the Holocaust. The questions we then need to ask are: What can the image of Christ convey that words alone cannot? What purpose does it serve?

In looking at the three texts, starting with Duden, then turning to von Trotta, and lastly turning to Karpf, I will begin each reading with an analysis of the identification made by the narrator and will examine how their identities are constructed in light of their inheritance of the past. I will then examine more closely the identifications with Christ in the text and consider why these specific images are being used within the context of the narrator's experience of life as inheritors of the *sinister shadows of the past*.

## CHAPTER 1

### Experiencing Guilt: Suffering in Anne Duden's "Der Übergang"

*Übergang*, a collection of short stories by Anne Duden, was published in 1982. The work focuses on the relationship between the narrator's identity and her identification with Germany's National Socialist past, and is therefore of particular interest to those interested in the process of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*<sup>6</sup>. Despite continuously publishing works since the early 1980s, Duden has failed to reach a large audience outside of the academic setting, a fact that may be attributed to the complexity of her stories, which defy casual reading. Yet within academic literary circles, her works, particularly her early short story "Übergang", have received much attention and have been both highly praised and heavily critiqued. "Übergang" tells the story of a young woman in her thirties whose jaw is broken in an attack by American GIs outside of a discothèque in Berlin; her subsequent suffering while recovering at the hospital becomes the focus of the narration. Memories from the narrator's childhood, set during and shortly after World War II, are interspersed throughout the text; flashback scenes are indicated by the use of italics. The majority of the story is a first-person account of events; only the attack itself is described from an outsider's third-person perspective. Duden is known for a writing style which makes use of graphic, detailed descriptions of physical events, most notably those of suffering, violence, and death. Her frequent repetition of words such as

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<sup>6</sup> German: trying to come to terms with the past, work through the past, cope with the past.

*Terror* and *Panik*, as well as verbs such as *stöhnen*, *zusammensinken*, *schreien* and *bluten*, add to the text's visceral quality and evocative nature. Duden's ability to use language in order to convey physical anguish has, however, been a highly critiqued feature of her writing. Many literary scholars, including Stephanie Bird in her book *Women Writers and National Identity*, argue that Duden's description of suffering transgresses the accepted boundaries of depicting suffering and instead encroaches upon sadistic tendencies: "Yet it behooves the critic to ask at what point the portrayal of anguish and injury moves from critical comment to become the indulgence of a solipsistic [egoistical, self-absorbed] narrator" (Bird 101). However, I disagree with the assertion that Duden is being self-indulgent in her depiction of suffering; rather, these grotesque depictions of suffering serve to exemplify the severity of the physical and mental suffering which the narrator experiences and force the reader to actively engage with the text. Without the use of graphic language, the narrator's anguish could too easily be overlooked. Other literary scholars, such as Margaret Littler, have questioned whether Duden, in depicting such violence, violates the norms of *écriture féminine*<sup>7</sup> and succumbs to the use of phallogentric language. "Her works present writing itself as violent [...] which is fundamentally in conflict with life, *especially* life as a woman" (43). I find it disconcerting that feminist literary theory often asserts that violence belongs to the domain of men and should not be included in women's writing. This conception of violence as masculine fosters binary thinking in which women are relegated to certain stylistic writing conventions. Relegating any subject, violent or otherwise, to a certain gender is a dangerous path to take and should be avoided, because it limits an

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<sup>7</sup> *Ecriture feminine* is a writing style originating in France in the 1970s. Hélène Cixous first introduced the idea in her work *The Laugh of the Medusa*, published in 1975. This form of writing connects writing with the female body; Cixous argues that ink should flow from the pen much as milk flows from the breast.

individual's ability to fully express themselves, in thought and action. Duden's work is worthy of attention precisely because her writing, through her blending of fiction and memoir, violence and introspection, and objective narration juxtaposed with streams of consciousness, defies conventional categorization. The depiction of violent suffering provides a new vantage point for the reader, one which is rarely found in the German context within women's writing outside of Duden's work.

Duden has been the subject of controversy regarding her depictions of race in "Übergang" and has been accused of propagating negative stereotypes of blacks. This controversy stems from accusations made by Leslie Adelson in her book *Making Bodies, Making History: Feminism and German Identity*, in which Adelson argues that Duden's writing fosters racial stereotypes by reinforcing "the racist premise of her privileged position" (53) due to the fact that the story begins with a scene in which the narrator, a *white* woman, is attacked by *black* GIs.<sup>8</sup> I will extrapolate on this scene of the attack later in this chapter, but I feel it should be mentioned that many scholars, including Sigrid Weigel and Theresa Ludden, have rebuked Adelson's argument, claiming that Adelson's criticism is not validated due to the fact that 'darkness' receives both disfavored and privileged positions within the story, a fact that Adelson briefly mentions yet quickly dismisses. In response to Adelson's accusations, Sigrid Weigel writes: "Duden durchbricht in ihrer Schreibweise nicht nur die herrschenden Gegensatzpaare, sondern sie gibt dem Dunkeln in ihrem Text seine Mehrdeutigkeit zurück" (129). I would further

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<sup>8</sup> Teresa Ludden, in her book "Das Undarstellbare darstellen: Kulturkritik and the Representation of Difference in the works of Anne Duden" has suggested that Adelson's criticism was aimed more at the literary institutions which refused to acknowledge race as an issue than at Duden per se. "This is a 'feminist' reading but is mostly concerned with feminist debates of the time. That is, it is motivated by the 1980s concern that radical feminist ideas and writing by white Western women in the 1960s and 1970s did not go far enough in tackling the problems of Black women or racism" (13).



argue that the complexity of the story, with its heavy reliance on symbolism and fluidity between reality and imagination, precludes a simple interpretation of race. By focusing only on the attack, the crux of the story is overlooked, as the attack itself is at the periphery of the story. The vast majority of the story takes place after this incident, symbolized by the switch from third-person narrative to first-person narrative at the time of the first operation following her arrival in the hospital.<sup>9</sup> This notion of privileging the latter portion of the story is echoed by Theresa Ludden in her book *Das Undarstellbare Darstellen* as well, when she says: “I would go further to state that the whole section narrating the attack is not of central importance as it is narrated with brevity while the vast majority of the narrative focuses on the narrator’s pain when undergoing operations and plastic surgery” (13). It should however be noted that while the attack is situation on the periphery of the narrative, it does serve as the catalyst for, and set the tone of, the story. Right from the beginning, we encounter a world that is strikingly violent and the reader is given no reason to believe that, even before the attack, a *heile Welt* existed; violence is the norm. However, the locus of violence is initially located outside the narrator’s body, for it is the GIs who inflict the violence on her. Following the attack, the violence continues, but it is internalized; the suffering is now being inflicted on the narrator by her mind and her body.

Despite the varying readings of “Übergang” in regards to race, the story is almost unanimously read as depicting a clash between the violence of the male world and a suffering female victim.<sup>10</sup> It is this reading of the narrator as victim that I intend to

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<sup>9</sup> The switch from 3<sup>rd</sup> Person narrative to 1<sup>st</sup> Person narrative was first observed by Leslie Adelson in her book *Making Bodies, Making History*, page 46.

challenge. Contrary, then, to Stephanie Bird's statement that "the protagonist [is] depicted as a suffering, passive victim" (104), I argue that the narrator is neither a victim nor passive in her suffering. The fact that the narrator suffers does not make her a victim; instead, she willingly engages with her suffering and embraces it as a form of rebellion against the German society in which she lives; a society that continues to ignore its tainted past in regard to the atrocities of the Holocaust: "Die Heere der Toten, die Gemordeten, und so oder so Um-die-Ecke-Gebrachten wurden einfach verschwiegen; das Nie-wieder-gut-zu-Machende existierte nicht nur nicht, sondern war Hirngespinnst" (74). The society in which the narrator lives fails to show any interest in addressing the violence and terror of its past; the narrator makes clear that society has not sufficiently changed since the end of the war, as violence against others continues to be ignored. This can be seen in the description of the attack on her brother, in which the narrator is screaming for help, but is met with blank stares: "Viele Gesichter waren ihnen leer zugewandt. Aber nichts geschah" (Duden 58). Violence and suffering permeate every aspect of the narrative and I argue that the primary focus on suffering in the narrative is as an active form of self-redemption from the narrator's inherited guilt, which has not been allowed expression within society. Through her suffering, she is able to actively rebel against societal rules that advocate silencing of the past and which undermine the process of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* and instead actively address her issues of guilt. Much as Margaret McCarthy describes the attack as "the initial act of violence which cracks her external shell" (218), I would argue that while the narrator has perhaps always

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<sup>10</sup> "The constant presence of violence in the texts and the resulting despair of the narrators seem to invite feminist interpretations which implicitly accept the female subject as a victim; the violence is an external ill inflicted upon her" (Bird 95).

been aware of her inherited guilt, it is through the *cracking of her shell* that the true process of coming to terms with her guilt is initiated.

While the narrator's suffering serves as a means to address the ignored past and thus can be understood as rebellious suffering, I would further argue that through the writing style, the text itself also serves a rebellious purpose, attempting to counter Germany's social apathy and guilt by forcing the reader to address the violence presented in the text. The violence of the text becomes noticeable through repetition of words such as *Angst, Schmerzen, Dunkelheit, Tod, Krieg*, through fragmentary paragraphs and short sentences, through the disorientating switching between reality, memory and dream sequences, and through revolting depictions of body functions, with phrases such as *schleimige Substanz, Gekotze*, and *plattgewalzte, plattgefetzte Reste*. The writing is steeped in violence and pain, making it impossible for the reader to argue that violence has been contained in the Nazi past; violence is painfully present and demands to be addressed. If the apathy of society is caused by people's belief that no action needs to be taken because the violence and horror ended with World War II, the text forces a reevaluation of those beliefs.

The guilt which the narrator confronts is undoubtedly representative of the guilt of her generation. She, along with her entire generation, has inherited the guilt of her country, has inherited the "Leichenberge von Besiegten" (71), but has been raised to ignore her past: "Ich wurde erwachsen, als wäre nichts geschehen. Nur irgendwo, nicht zu orten und unauslotbar, wurde etwas immer schlimmer" (71). Importantly, while the narrator depicts her family in flashback scenes, no single act of her family in connection to Nazi atrocities is described. Instead, the narrator recounts everyday events, such as

going to the store with her little brother “Ich hielt Henning an der Hand. Wir kauften Brausepulver bei der Süßigkeitenbude” (68) or helping her mother take care of the household “Ich durfte [...] Mahlzeiten herrichten, mit saubermachen, einkaufen gehen” (71). From looking at these depictions of her family, we see that the guilt which the narrator feels is not specific to her family’s actions. Rather, it is a national guilt, based on her national identity as a German, as the inheritor of the Nazi past. The narrator describes the silence of Germans, saying: “Draußen der Krieg, über den niemand ein Wort verlor, den niemand als solchen bezeichnete” (70). The repetition of *niemand* further accentuates this sense of generalized failure. It was not a specific group that avoided talking about the war, it was not just her family; it was everyone. Because of the narrator’s identification with her nation and generation, I would resist confining her sense of guilt and suffering solely to the domain of the female, as others have suggested.<sup>11</sup> Instead, I would argue that identifications beyond that of gender are possible and, for the purpose of this chapter, the narrator’s identification with her nation needs to be at the forefront of the reading. The narrator defines her identity within the framework of her country’s history, making no claim to that history being singularly hers, or singularly feminine, but rather being a history that applies to all Germans. The narrator is who she is because Germany’s past is what it is. Her inner turmoil is present because of the situation into which she, a second-generation perpetrator child, was born.

The narrator suffers because of the inherited national guilt that is festering inside, and I would argue that the key to understanding and interpreting the narrator’s suffering is then found in the repeated use of Christian imagery throughout the narrative. The

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<sup>11</sup> Claim articulated by Stephanie Bird in *Women Writers and National Identity* as well as by Teresa Ludden in *Kulturkritik*.

narrator aligns herself with Christ in order to give meaning to her suffering and reaffirm her position as agent in the suffering process; for as much as Christ suffered, he willingly chose to suffer. Likewise, the narrator suffers, but she, too, suffers willingly. This readiness to suffer has been mentioned by Leslie Adelson, when she says that: “The protagonist welcomes the moment precipitated by [the attack]” (50). The narrator welcomes suffering as a means to address her guilt and through it seeks redemption from inherited guilt, analogous to Christ’s purpose in suffering. By taking on the role of the suffering Christ, she “seeks to overcome the meaninglessness of life [...] by finding meaning in suffering” (Smith 171). In using Christian language in this chapter, it becomes important to define how the term *redemption* is to be understood in this context. To do so, it behooves us to draw on the German parallel *Erlösung*, for the German translation better exemplifies the origin of the word. The stem of the word *Erlösung* lies in the verb *lösen*: to loosen, to free up. To be *erlöst* can then be understood as being loosened from inner binds, giving emotions room to move freely. Thus, for the purpose of this paper, redemption is not defined theologically; it is not something that is granted by an outside force. Rather, redemption is an internal process, granted by the individual themselves, by their conscience. To find *Erlösung* then does not indicate a purging of guilt by a higher power or an absolution of responsibility; rather it is the mental process of freeing yourself from the tight emotional binds that you are in and allowing emotions to be experienced.

Interestingly, many scholars reading Duden have overlooked her use of Christian imagery, failing to either notice or realize its significance. Stephanie Bird comments on the suffering in the story, stating that: “The [suffering] is [...] reifying and disgusting.

The suffering body is not [...] that of the martyr who will be rewarded by God or fame” (106). Contrary to Bird, I argue that the significance of the Christian imagery is profoundly important, for by analyzing the imagery, we come to understand the suffering in the text in an entirely new light: We no longer see the narrator solely as a victim of aggression, but rather as an assertive individual who is willing to actively engage the past in order to address her inner guilt. While her suffering body may be ‘disgusting’, as Bird claims, I would argue that she does hope for a reward; not from God, but from her conscience. The narrator fervently seeks redemption from her guilt and therefore actively suffers in order to rebel against society’s silence with respect to its past: “[Suffering] challenges the norms of social intercourse which depend upon the refusal to acknowledge repression” (Bird 100). Like Christ, she refuses to accept society the way it is, refuses to accept the imposed silence. Instead, she actively works towards overcoming the burden of her guilt. Her identification with Christ also depends upon the use of graphic language, for if the language were not able to conjure up images of extreme anguish, with words such as *Qual*, *zerfetzen*, *revoltieren*, and *schreien*, this identification would seem excessive or unnatural. However, through her use of language, we understand that the experience is excruciating for the narrator. She describes herself as being “aufgebahrt in der Hölle meiner selbst” (67). The connection she makes to being in her own hell demands equally strong imagery to give meaning to her suffering, explaining the need to appropriate the image of a suffering Christ.

As stated earlier, the process of suffering is initiated by the attack by American GIs, which comes as a horrific, yet welcomed, event for it “enables her to confront the violence which has been repressed in her unconscious” (Hanes and Littler 63). The attack

is described as follows: “Ihr Kopf wurde in der unteren Gesichtshälfte von einem schweren Gegenstand getroffen. [...] Sie hob eine Hand, um ihre Lippen zu berühren, berührte aber statt dessen aufgerissenes und geplatztes Weiches und lose darin hängende Zähne“ (60). Through the attack, the narrator is severed from societal demands to ignore the *Um-die-Ecke-Gebrachten*. Separation from society is depicted in a positive light, when her feelings immediately after her attack are described as a moment of relief:

Im Grunde war ich erleichtert. [...] Ich spürte deutlich, dass etwas Grosses, ja Bedeutungsvolles geschehen war. Etwas, das die Kraft hatte, mich aus diesem Leben der Schönheit – des Körpers und des Verstandes – endgültig, das heist auch physisch nachweisbar, rauszuwerfen. Ein Gefühl wie vor Antritt ewiger Ferien. [...] Ich war frei. (63)

What is interesting to notice is the juxtaposition of the word *erleichtert* with *Antritt ewiger Ferien*. The description of an eternal vacation is a term commonly used to describe death. Keeping this in mind, we realize that the term *erleichtert* should perhaps not be understood as relief in the sense of being free from physical pain, for “the use of the term ‘*erleichtert*’ (relieved) is not combined with any suggestion that the physical manifestation of her anguished self makes the anguish any lighter to bear” (Bird 99). Rather, I would suggest reading the term *erleichtert* literally, that is, as a ‘lightening up’ of her self; through her attack she is able to open up and let the turmoil that has been confined within her escape. In her book *Second-Generation Holocaust Literature*, Erin McGlothlin describes second-generation individuals as having “[the mark of the past] which festers inside as an internal lesion that, unseen, prohibits the easy digestion of history, despite the external whitewashing of the traces of violence and the restoration of normality” (9). It is this festering that the narrator experiences within and which,

following the attack, is finally able to be addressed. This ability to let her guilt come to light gives the narrator the sense of being *erleichtert*.

Furthermore, it is interesting to note that the narrator's sense of being *erleichtert* is also tied to her sense of being removed from a life of "*Schönheit – des Körpers and des Verstandes*" (63). This idea of the beauty of the body and the mind can be best understood by looking at another flashback scene in the text in which the narrator is recounting her difficulty in finding happiness during her youth, something which other people seem readily able to do:

Fast alle brachten es fertig, daß die Rechnungen ihres Lebens aufgingen. [...] Ich war ja noch jung. Das würde ich schon hinkriegen. [...] Es fehlten nur noch ein paar schicke Klamotten und das Geld für den Friseur. Ich schminkte mich schon bald täglich. [...] Das Glück hieß zu der Zeit die große Liebe. Dann war es mal beruflicher Erfolg, mal Bildung und Schönheit, mal alles zusammen. [Aber] ich kam ans Glück einfach nicht ran. (74)

Her upbringing has clearly taught her that striving for *Schönheit* is a means to find *Glück*. It has been ingrained in her that if only she tries hard enough to be physically attractive, if only she attains enough education and rationality and thus acquires a beautiful mind, then happiness can be found. But the narrator fails at the task at hand; the festering *Leichengift* within her does not allow her to comfortably live a life of beauty; the *Leichenberge* cannot be ignored. Thus, following the attack, the narrator is relieved, for *Schönheit* is no longer attainable and she is thus freed from the societal pressure to strive for what has always been unattainable to her. Her disfigurement is seen as a relief, "for it is precisely with the broken, dangling jaw that the narrator can assert her identity honestly. She need no longer live the masquerade whereby the whole, unified body is assumed to represent a whole, untroubled ego" (Bird 96-97). This explains the narrator's negative reactions upon hearing her doctor proclaim: "Sie werden so aussehen wie früher, darüber machen Sie



sich mal keine Gedanken” (77). The word *Gedanken* strikes a disturbing tone, for one would expect the phrase to end with the word *Sorgen*. *Machen Sie sich keine Sorgen*. But he chooses to say *Gedanken* – thoughts – making it clear that the doctor assumes that she, like others, wants to simply blend into society. What he fails to understand is that she does not want life to be *so wie früher*; she longs for change and wants to be *thinking* about the past. The narrator is relieved to have an outward manifestation of her inner guilt: “Dabei konnte ich doch vor Glück sagen, daß nun endlich auch meine Anatomie einen Knacks bekommen hatte, daß der Körper aufzuholen beginnen konnte, was bis dahin allein meinem Gehirnkopf vorbehalten war” (63). The narrator is not passively accepting her *Knacks* but rather actively reveling in it for it provides an outlet for the *Leichengift*.

As mentioned earlier, much attention has been given to the details of this attack by feminist scholars.<sup>12</sup> Keeping in mind the narrator’s fight against the complacency which she witnesses in her society, I believe that a vital element of the attack has been ignored, namely the fact that the attackers are *American* GIs. The reason that their nationality is of importance lies in the fact that they, American soldiers occupying Germany as guardians of peace, provide one of the only outward symbols of Germany’s guilt. The American forces are not welcomed guests and would not be in Germany if it had not been for World War II. Their presence is a constant reminder of the past German society tries so hard to ignore. The fact then, that the event which allows the narrator to process her guilt, the attack, is instigated not from within her own society, but from

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<sup>12</sup> See Leslie Adelson’s *Making Bodies, Making History: Feminism and German Identity* for origin of the debate. For rebuttal, see Sigrid Weigel’s *Die Stimme der Medusa*. Helpful overview of this debate and other secondary literature can also be found in Teresa Ludden’s ‘*Das Undarstellbare darstellen*’: *Kulturkritik and the Representation of Difference in the Works of Anne Duden*.

outsiders, is critical to understanding the story. Society, as depicted by the narrator, does not encourage individuals to deal with their guilt; society prefers citizens to live their day-to-day life as if nothing has happened. This idea of silencing the past is echoed by Robert Moeller in his book *War Stories: The search for a Useable Past in the Federal Republic of Germany*, in which he describes the 1950s and 1960s in Germany as “a decade of historical silence and willing forgetfulness” (15), and goes on to say that “the dominant forms of public memory left little space for reflecting on the suffering Germans had caused others” (13). While select individuals clearly advocated addressing the past, among them Karl Jaspers and Theodor Adorno, society as a whole chose to ignore their requests and remained silent. Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich, in their 1967 study, noted this phenomenon, stating that “Wir [stoßen] auf Indifferenz” (17) and they describe society’s behavior as one that is “von Verleugnungen bestimmt” (8). Thus while German society may not willingly engage in discussions about its guilt, outsiders, starting with the Allies in immediate post-war Germany during the denazification processes, show a greater propensity to bring forth discussions about Germany’s guilt and responsibility. *Nacht und Nebel*, a thirty-two minute French documentary on the Holocaust, stirred up intense discussions in Germany after it was banned from the Cannes Film Festival in 1956 because of German protest.<sup>13</sup> While many felt it could potentially “incite anti-German hatred” (Hebard 87), others explicitly supported the distribution and screenings of the film. Although the film subsequently was frequently screened in Germany, a discussion of the issues brought forth by the film was often conspicuously absent.

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<sup>13</sup> For further information see Andrew Hebard’s Essay *Disruptive Histories: Towards a Radical Politics of Remembrance in Alain Resnais’s Night and Fog*, printed in the New German Critique, No. 71, Memories of Germany, pp. 87-113.

Having acts of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* instigated by foreigners is seen in Duden's text in the scene in which the narrator recalls watching *Nacht und Nebel* as a child on television.<sup>14</sup> "Dann sah ich das Wegbaggern der Leichenberge in >Nacht und Nebel< - und wußte, wenn das einmal passiert ist, kann es jederzeit wieder passieren, eigentlich allen, je nachdem. Auch mir" (64). Here the narrator first vocalizes awareness of the fact that the past has not been properly confronted, for if the Holocaust happened once, what is stopping it from happening again? Clearly, in her eyes, society has not changed enough to ensure that such horror will never occur again. Importantly, it is due to a *French* film that the narrator first questions her guilt as a child. Her viewing of the film also reflects the silence of German society, for the subsequent discussion one would expect her parents to lead is noticeably absent. The narrator is left to process this information on her own and she internalizes the horrors without being given the opportunity to confront the past. If her initial exposure to guilt came from a French source, her process of trying to come to terms with her inner guilt as an adult once again results from outside influences. This time, it is the attack by the Americans GIs that breaks her *shell* and forces the issue to the forefront.<sup>15</sup>

Entrenched in her suffering following the attack, we see Duden make use of identification with Christ in which corollaries between Christ and the narrator are brought to our attention, for example, their age at the time of suffering and death. Jesus was

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<sup>14</sup> *Nacht und Nebel* is a 1955 French film by director Alain Resnais about Nazi concentration camps, based on poems written by Jean Cayrol, a Holocaust survivor. The film's intention was to raise questions of guilt and responsibility.

<sup>15</sup> The question of why this process needed to be instigated through such violent means, namely the breaking of the jaw, is a legitimate question, but one that is outside of the scope of this chapter.

crucified at thirty-three<sup>16</sup>; the narrator references her age of thirty-three as the time when she first truly becomes aware of her inherited Nazi guilt. She recounts her insight of realizing, “dass es um Ausrottung ging. Die Spezies, zu der ich gehörte, [...] war die Spezies der Verantwortlichen. Die meisten unter ihnen wußten nicht einmal das” (64). The use of *Ausrottung* forms a direct link to the Holocaust, for the term *Ausrottung der Juden* was commonplace term during the Nazi-era and therefore indicates, on the part of the narrator, an acceptance of guilt in regards to the Holocaust. The use of the word *Spezies* is disturbing in that it is reminiscent of the language used to describe Jews as a sub-human *Spezies* during the Third Reich. But by defining herself as a certain *Spezies*, a German species, she openly acknowledges the fact that it is her nationality which imparts the guilt upon her, that her guilt is an inherent German quality. The narrator’s suffering thus begins not when she realizes that her guilt exists, but rather when she realizes that, unlike others, she is not able to ignore the guilt any longer. She describes others as being able to carry on with their day-to-day existence, oblivious to their responsibility to address the question of their inherited guilt. The narrator, however, can no longer tolerate living quietly within a society that has caused indescribable suffering for so many, yet continues to ignore its legacy. We see this reflected again when she describes her memories of the war; already at a young age she observes the horrors that others seem to overlook: “Ich sah überall Dinge, die die anderen gar nicht wahrzunehmen schienen” (70). While others may be able to ignore the war and its aftermath, she is forced to look at Germany’s past, for she cannot ignore the festering within.

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<sup>16</sup> The belief that Jesus died at age 33 is based on the fact that Jesus was born before the death of Herod the Great in 4 BC. He is believed to have begun his ministry after being baptized by John at age thirty. Based on the events describing his ministry in the bible, including the number of Passovers he partook in, it is estimated that his ministry lasted three years, thereby having his age at death be 33.

Christian numerology also figures heavily in Duden's work, which may be seen in reference to the number seven, generally understood to be the number of God.<sup>17</sup> One prominent reference to the number seven comes in an early scene in which the narrator has arrived at the hospital and has been scheduled to be operated on at 7 o'clock in the morning. When the morning comes, the narrator experiences intense terror and struggles against the doctor's attempts to *anesthetize* her, for they are trying to return her to their 'normal' way of life; a life of apathy towards history. But the narrator fights against this, wanting to stay cognizant so as to be able to fully tackle the guilt felt inside:

Wir operieren um sieben. Sieben. Sieben. Lieber Gott, hilf mir. [...]  
Über allen Gipfeln ist Ruh. Sieben.  
Bewegungen ging auf eine breite dunkelbraune Tür zu.  
Guten Morgen, ich bin Ihr Anästhesiearzt.  
Sieben. [...]  
Mein Anästhesiearzt. Er gehört zu ihnen. (65-66)

The number seven is emphasized through frequent repetition and clearly correlated with Christianity as the number seven is often followed either directly with pleas with God for help or with other Christian imagery, such as that of the cross. The narrator is in anguish not because of the pain, but because of fear of what will follow the operation; she does not want to return to society and is fighting against becoming numb to the pain of the world, fighting against the group of others who are trying to keep her from addressing the guilt within: "Er gehört zu *ihnen*" (66). She does not want to be part of the *ihnen*, the description given to the doctors and all others who belong to group of people who are living yet unaware of guilt and suffering in this world. The imagery of the passage, the

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<sup>17</sup> The number seven is a reoccurring number in the bible; it is believed to be the holy number because the 7<sup>th</sup> day was the day in which God rested, recounted in the story of creation in Genesis 2:3: "So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation." The number seven is also often contrasted with the number of man, 6, based on the 6<sup>th</sup> day in which man was created and because of the reference to the number of the beast in Revelations 13:18.

stillness lying over the peaks, “über allen Gipfeln ist Ruh” (65), is reminiscent of Golgotha after the resurrection of Christ,<sup>18</sup> who is said to have risen again in the early morning hours, a possible further correlation to the hour of 7 A.M. given in this story. In thinking about Golgotha, we then notice the similarity between the description of the door of the operating room as a *wide, dark brown door* and a description of the crucifix as a *wide, dark brown cross*. Recognizing the possibility of reading this description of the door as a cross provides a richer understanding of what is taking place in this scene, for we gain insight into the emotions that the narrator is experiencing. The narrator fears the operation due to the inevitability of suffering that will follow; a fear of the cross, of death, of losing the battle against ‘the others’. But, at the same time, the peaceful Golgotha reminds her that, after all is said and done, a peaceful outcome can be hoped for. Redemption from guilt may be within reach, as long as she continues her fight against the anesthetization of her guilt.

During her pain-filled recovery, in which she is “überwältigt vom eigenen Schmerz” (81), the narrator is given a portable cassette player in order to be able to listen to music, for music has always had the ability to soothe her, as we see during a flashback scene to her childhood, in which she describes the effect music has on her: “Wie ein Sturmwind brachte sie etwas in Bewegung, zerschlug blitzschnell alles Feste und Schwere und gab mir ein Gefühl von Durchlässigkeit, wo das Innen genauso viel galt wie das Außen” (68). The importance of music lies precisely in its ability to give credence to her emotions and provides an outlet for what is *Innen*. It is the *Durchlässigkeit* of music, its ability to let emotions move freely, that she treasures. The fact, then, that the narrator

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<sup>18</sup> Golgotha: Hill outside of Jerusalem where Jesus was crucified, mentioned in Matthew 27:33.

listens to Christian hymns during her recovery is paramount, for the songs are to be understood as an expression of her emotions. The reader is told that only in listening to hymns is her body able to relax, “Es breitete sich wie eine Entwarnung über mich, entspannte sogar die Beine, die endlich einmal ruhig ausgestreckt blieben, und wickelte mich vollständig ein” (82). The narrator is able to make sense of her intense physical suffering through the identification that she can make with the content of the songs; by seeing herself as Christ, as someone who is suffering for a purpose. Through music, she finds a means to express herself and we see her identifying her soul with that of Christ:

*Jesu, du meine Seele – mehr von dem Gesungenen konnte ich zunächst nicht verstehen. Es reichte schon. Hast durch deinen bitteren Tod... Deiner Güte will ich trauen, bis ich fröhlich werde schauen dich, Herr Jesu, nach dem Streit in der süßen Ewigkeit.* (83)

The narrator sees her soul as connected to Christ, connected to his story and his suffering. We see her opening up emotionally, letting out the guilt that weighs her down, and replacing it with hope; the hope of a better outcome, a cleansing of her conscience. Her trust in his *Güte* shows her belief in the ability to attain redemption after the *Streit* concerning her guilt is over. Through this song she is able to vocalize her belief in reaping a reward for her suffering. However, the use of the term *Ewigkeit* complicates her desires, for we realize that she is aware that *Fröhlichkeit* may never be able to be attained in life; it is perhaps only to be found in a distant *Ewigkeit*.

The moment of greatest anguish for the narrator occurs at the moment during recovery in which she is, for the first time following her surgery, required to open her mouth again. “Ich habe noch nie etwas so Schreckliches erlebt” (76). Symbolically we can read this as the moment at which her inner guilt is able to find full expression through the symbolic opening of the mouth; she describes the route to her mouth as a route

through the “immer weiter anschwellenden Trümmerhaufen” (75). Guilt is finally able to fully escape and the experience is horrific. The imagery of the crucifixion in this scene becomes evident when the narrator describes how the medical instrument “durchragte mich wie ein Pfahl” (76), drawing a parallel to the wound inflicted on Jesus by a spear while being crucified.<sup>19</sup> The Christ motif and the narrator’s suffering culminate in the moment in which the description is unmistakably reminiscent of a description of Jesus on the Cross: “Schief und krumm, eine einzige Grimasse, hing ich da in meiner Haltung. Es gab nichts, keinen Gedanken, kein Gefühl, kein Bild, das mich aus dieser Ewigkeit herausgeführt hätte“ (76). The narrator has in that moment become an image of suffering, an image to be viewed by the reader, much as an image of a crucifix would be viewed. The moment is described from the narrator’s point of view, but it is as if she is looking at herself from the outside. The narrator describes this moment as having arrived at “ein erlöstes Ende” (76), once again making use of religious language. But the narrator’s *Erlösung* is fleeting; it lasts only a short moment before she is brought back into her body, back into a position of agency: “Plötzlich eine Kühle, [die mich] wieder herausholten” (76). The narrator’s ability to distance herself from her suffering, if only fleetingly, allows her the ability to reflect on her suffering and thus, allows her to better understand her position within society. I would argue that it is only at this moment, through her self-reflection, that she comes to realize the impossibility of being freed from guilt; it is not a sustainable position within society. *Erlösung* is indeed found, but it looks different than expected, for she realizes that finding *Erlösung* does not end her suffering. Only here does the narrator come to understand *Erlösung* as we have defined it, namely a loosening up of guilt, not a removal of it. While her redemption allows her to more easily

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<sup>19</sup> John 19: 34: “One of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear”.



access her feelings of guilt, no longer having to silence them, her guilt will never disappear.

Recognizing the parallels drawn with the image of Christ in this story forces us to re-evaluate the notion of suffering and makes us realize that suffering in the story is positively valued, contrary to what an initial reading of the text may purport. By seeing the narrator as a Christ figure, we come to understand that her suffering is not that of a victim, but rather that of an active participant; she is willingly suffering in order to rebel against the norms of society that demand that she live a *beautiful* life and ignore the festering within. Seeing her suffering as a path to *Erlösung* from guilt allows us the perspective to read this short story not simply as a portrayal of the victimization of women within society, but rather as a portrayal of an individual who chooses to suffer physically, as did Christ, in order to find *Erlösung* from her inherited guilt. In doing so, the narrator gains the ability to address the festering within, a festering which others continue to ignore. This ability and willingness to address her guilt sets her apart from society, much as she has longed for; but being set apart should not be understood as indicative of a happy ending; rather, she has become alienated from society. After returning home at the end of the story, her isolation becomes evident. Other people have moved on with their lives; leaving her behind: “Irgentwie bin ich vergessen worden” (94). The story began with her surrounded by family and friends while out at a nightclub, but ends with her feeling abandoned by others. In a moment of self-reflection following her suffering, she confesses: “Ich habe mich mühsam da hindurchbewegt, wo eigentlich nichts sich bewegen sollte” (94). The use of the word *sollte* indicates her awareness that her attempt to address guilt is not socially sanctioned or acceptable. Her active suffering

has brought *Erlösung*, but in doing so, it has also ensured her continued suffering. No end is in sight.

While the narrator fails to find absolution from her guilt, the text also refuses to let the reader escape from the process of reading with any feeling of finality. Rather, it leaves us with an eerie feeling of alienation and confusion. The final scenes are described in a manner in which the reader becomes witness to a deserted world in which everything is slightly off kilter. The courtyard of the narrator's apartment building is described with words such as *Stille*, *absolute Geräuschverbot* and *Dunkelheit*. Humans are nowhere to be found. The colors of the world are darkened, shadows are seen everywhere, grey and cold steel permeates every surface. Branches of trees are black and convey intense loneliness: "die schwarzen Äste des Ahornbaums [...] rührten sich nicht" (88). The building is described as devoid of life: "Die Welt ist hier im Innersten schon ausgestorben. [...] Niemand scheint mehr in diesem riesigen Gebäude zu sein. [...] Ein Ruinengrundstück" (93). We are confronted by a world which is devoid of life and while the Holocaust victims are never mentioned explicitly by the narrator, the text makes their presence explicitly felt. The world is empty. Society has attempted to put a "Schluß. Ende" (93) to the story of the Holocaust, but the ending is only an illusion, for everywhere, people continue to be missing from life. If the narrator's focus lies more on her guilt than on the suffering of the victim, the text attempts to address the causes of the war more directly by inserting a paragraph that is distinct from all others in that the narrator no longer appears to be the one speaking and the readers are directly accused by the text:

Ich versteh euch nicht, ich hab nicht den leisesten Schimmer, wie ihr was macht. Ich weiß aber ganz genau, daß ihr alle so weit seid, daß ihr nur noch auf das Kommando, das letzte wartet. Ihr seid alle schlacht- und schlächterreif. [...] Ihr seid die ganze Zeit schon bereit. (93)

The frustration with society's lack of introspection and lack of willingness to address the past is placed at the forefront and the text emphasizes the belief that society has not changed enough to ensure that the horrors of the Holocaust will not happen again, much as the narrator feared after watching *Nacht und Nebel*. More than just addressing feelings of guilt, the text argues for an examination of the willingness to engage in violence. In 1966, Theodor Adorno argued that, "Man spricht von der drohenden Rückfall in die Barbarei. Aber er droht nicht, sondern Auschwitz war er; Barbarei besteht fort, solange die Bedingungen, die jenen Rückfall zeitigen, wesentlich fort dauern" (674). Adorno asserts that society has not sufficiently purged itself of the conditions which made National Socialist Germany possible. Duden, writing in 1981, clearly feels that even though fifteen years have passed since Adorno's statement, his argument continues to be valid. The text makes clear that until German society, until the reader, is willing to look at itself and honestly address these issues, the future continues to be in danger.

## CHAPTER 2

### Rebelling against Society: Confronting Institutionalized Silence in Margarethe von Trotta's *Die Bleierne Zeit*

Margarethe von Trotta has become a well established figure in German cinema, finding herself amongst the other great names of the New German Cinema movement: Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Werner Herzog, Wim Wenders, and Volker Schlöndorff. Having worked both in front of and behind the camera, it has been her work as a director that has brought her the most acclaim. Her films confront questions of identity, specifically those of women, within the context of Germany's national past and current political situation. "Margarethe von Trotta's films are [all] subtly nuanced portrayals of the society of their time. Hidden beneath the individual stories [...] analysis reveals the great existential questions as to identity, the meaning of life, striving for happiness, social responsibility, and individual guilt" (Hehr 7). Von Trotta's breakthrough as a director came with the release in 1981 of her film *Die Bleierne Zeit*.<sup>20</sup> *Die Bleierne Zeit* was ceremoniously received, earning many prizes, among them the prestigious Venice Film Festival *Golden Lion*.<sup>21</sup> *Die Bleierne Zeit* is also the most often premiered movie in Germany of all time.<sup>22</sup> However, while the film garnered praise, particularly outside of

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<sup>20</sup> *Die Bleierne Zeit* would translate to 'the leaden times', a term used to describe life during the bleak 1950s. However, in the UK the film's title has been translated as *The German Sisters* and *Juliane and Marianne* in the USA.

<sup>21</sup> The Golden Lion is the award given to the best movie of the year.

<sup>22</sup> Info taken from Fischetti, *Das neue Kino*.

Germany, within Germany the initial reception was not as positive. For many, the film too closely mirrored Germany's recent past with the depiction of Marianne, a character based on the life of Gudrun Ensslin, a member of the terrorist group *RAF*, who died along with Jan-Carl Raspe and Andreas Baader at the Stammheim prison in 1977, four years before the release of *Die Bleierne Zeit*.<sup>23</sup> Their deaths were officially declared suicides, but opponents then and now accuse the government of murdering them.<sup>24</sup>

Criticism of *Die Bleierne Zeit* emerged from many different spheres: Some argued that the portrayal of Marianne was unfairly negative, privileging the more moderate life of her feminist sister Juliane.<sup>25</sup> Others expressed outrage at what they perceived to be too sympathetic a treatment of a terrorist.<sup>26</sup> The most ardent criticism came from Charlotte Delorme, in what Susan Linville terms an “influential and error-riddled review” (“Retrieving History” 448). Delorme makes the claim that the film is in essence Christiane Ensslin and Margarethe von Trotta's revenge on Gudrun Ensslin and should therefore be seen as “anti-feminist” (Linville, “Retrieving History” 448). However, Delorme's review was unfairly biased, taking many scenes completely out of the film's context and failing to mention important details that would have countered her own reading. “While Delorme seeks to discredit the film for supposedly distorting the Ensslins' story, her attempt must itself be discredited for indulging in distortion”

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<sup>23</sup> *RAF* stands for *Rote Armee Fraktion* (Red Army Faction), also commonly referred to as the Baader-Meinhof Gruppe. The RAF was Germany's 1970 prominent militant left-wing terrorist group.

<sup>24</sup> For a discussion on the death vs. suicide debate, see Karl-Heinz Weidenhammer's book *Selbstmord oder Mord? Das Todesermittlungsverfahren Baader/Ensslin/Raspe*. The chapter entitled *Deadly Abstraction: The Red Army Faction and the Politics of Murder* in Jeremy Varon's book *Bringing the War Home* also discusses this topic.

<sup>25</sup> See Ellen Seiter's article “The Political is Personal: Margarethe von Trotta's Marianne and Juliane”.

<sup>26</sup> See Thomas Elsaesser's book *New German Cinema*, page 237.

(Linville, “Retrieving History” 448). However, after the initial mixed reactions to the film subsided, many scholars have taken a renewed interest in the film, finding that the film provides fascinating insights into several areas of interest, including the German Autumn (although it should be stressed that this film does not purport to be a documentary and should not be considered historically accurate), the film’s feminist agenda, the intimate relationships among family members, the power dynamics of suicide, and so forth.<sup>27 28</sup>

*Die Bleierne Zeit* tells the story of two sisters, Marianne and Juliane. The sisters, who were close during their childhood, have become distanced from each other as adults. The film is narrated by the older sister Juliane, who was a rebellious teenager and who, now in her thirties, is working as a journalist for a feminist women’s magazine. Her younger sister, Marianne, who was the more naïve sister growing up, has become a member of a terrorist group (resembling the RAF). Marianne, after living in hiding, is arrested and imprisoned. It is then during prison visits that the sisters grow close again, yet they are torn apart after Marianne allegedly commits suicide in prison. Juliane subsequently dedicates all of her efforts to proving that her sister’s death was a murder. Interspersed with the present-day narrative are flashback scenes to their childhood, from which we gain insight into their authoritarian upbringing, which was dominated by their father, a Lutheran minister.

Interestingly, despite overt usage of Christian imagery in the film, specifically that of the crucifix and the portrayal of the church vis-à-vis the father, very little has been

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<sup>27</sup> The German Autumn is a term used to describe the events of late 1977 involving the RAF.

<sup>28</sup> The work of Susan Linville is particularly insightful and helpful in approaching the film, and I am grateful for her thorough analysis provided in her book *Feminism, Film, Fascism: Women’s Auto/Biographical Film in Postwar Germany*.

written about its use and implications in understanding the film. On the very rare occasion that religion is mentioned, it is overly simplified and often inadequately researched, with scholars generally either deeming all religious imagery to be negative, including that of the father and the crucifix, or they come to the opposite conclusion, namely that all religion in the film is positive, despite obvious contradictions in the reading.<sup>29</sup> Religion is thus relegated to a position of insignificance and, if mentioned, the focus is on the role of the father and his position within the Lutheran tradition; an analysis of the religious imagery in the film is not performed. In her book *Margarethe von Trotta: Filmmaking as Liberation*, Renate Hehr observes that “whether and how cinemagoers understand the language of a film depends on how well they recognize the symbols and know how to assign meaning to them” (6). However overlooked, analysis of Christian symbolism is thus vital to a complete understanding of the film, especially for understanding the critique that is being voiced against society.

It is my goal to help decode the symbolism used in the film in order to allow more complete access to the film’s many layers. In examining the use of Christian symbols, a differentiation between Christ and the church needs to be made, for the two are valued very differently in the film. The father, as pastor and representative of the church, is by extension also a representation of his generation within society. He is vehemently criticized for his continued insistence on the adherence to a rigid patriarchal structure, both within his family and within society, as we will see in scenes discussed later in this chapter. Christ, on the other hand, portrayed in a graphic crucifix painting, is positively

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<sup>29</sup> E. Ann Kaplan argues that all religion is negatively valued in her paper “Discourses of Terrorism, Feminism, and the Family in von Trotta’s *Marianne and Juliane*”, p.118. James Skidmore argues the opposite in his paper “Intellectualism and Emotionalism in Margarete von Trotta’s *Die Bleierne Zeit*”, p.560.

valued in the film, and I argue that Christ's actions and suffering serve as a role-model for Marianne; in him, she sees a rebellious leader willing to sacrifice everything in order to bring about change, much as she wishes to see herself. Thus, Christ's desire for change stands in stark contrast to the father's adherence to tradition. In exploring the ways in which these identifications are presented, I strive to answer the overarching questions that arise, namely: What are the ramifications of setting up a dichotomy between the church and Christ? What are the implications of Marianne's identification with Christ? How does Germany's past affect her identity?

In *Die Bleierne Zeit*, the father's position, both within the family and the church, is fiercely critiqued by von Trotta through her depiction of him as an angry, unrelenting patriarch. Within the family, we see him act out what Susan Linville describes as a "domineering, authoritarian role" which she notes is "backed by a barely contained threat of physical violence" (*Feminism* 100). Depictions of him are also marked by his inability to express any genuine emotion beside anger, as will be seen in the scene in which the family is at the chapel viewing the dead body of Marianne. Within the realm of the church, this portrayal of anger and violence is also at the forefront of his sermons, as we shall see in one of the flashback scenes that will be discussed later on in this chapter. Von Trotta draws a parallel between the father's authoritarian mode of functioning and society's mode of functioning, in that the father is representative of his generation, for he belongs to the generation of perpetrators and bystanders who continue to hold positions of power and suppress all demands for a restructuring of German society. Michael Schneider, in his seminal essay "Fathers and Sons, Retrospectively: The Damaged Relationship between two Generations", describes society's avoidance of change as



follows: “[Society] had reorganized itself with lightning speed after 1945 and had [no] interest in making the actual causes and the background of fascism a subject for public discussion” (7). Instead, society continued to follow old, authoritarian patterns of existence, never questioning the validity of doing so. In looking at the family structure in *Die Bleierne Zeit*, Linville then observes that: “[The daughters] are representative in that [they] come from a family whose typically oppressive patriarchal structures parallel those of the state and other institutions” (“Retrieving History” 447). In this way, the father’s repressive function within his family and his church is a mirroring of society’s repressive function. In his book *New German Cinema*, Thomas Elsaesser notes that the father’s presence in his daughter’s lives hinders their ability to confront the past because “in his arrogant isolation, he is an oppressive presence: unresponsive, denying, remote” (235). His daughters’ desire to question and discuss Germany’s past is met with indignant silence. The father does not show any interest in actively addressing the question of German guilt, as will be discussed below in the scene in which the film *Nacht und Nebel* is shown.<sup>30</sup> E. Ann Kaplan, in her article “Discourses of Terrorism, Feminism, and the Family in von Trotta’s *Marianne and Juliane*”, describes the situation of the daughters as one in which “the [...] children’s oppression within the family [by the father] is echoed by the (suggested) history of oppression at the level of the state” (Kaplan 119). That is to say that the father’s oppressive mode of running his family serves as a constant reminder of the oppressive German past, a past that is ever present yet never discussed. Under his authority, the home and the church are dominated by a patriarchal structure that closely resembles the patriarchal structure favored by the Nazis. As Susan Linville explains in her book *Feminism, Film, Fascism*, the church, through the father, continues to act as an

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<sup>30</sup> *Nacht und Nebel* is a 1955 French film; refer to footnotes 13&14 in Chapter 1 for more information.

“agent of repression” (14), replacing Hitler with many “little Führer” (34), thereby acting as a continuation of a *Reich* that only pretended to have fully ceased to exist.<sup>31</sup> Thus, the father is a representation of all that second-generation writers have come to disdain: he shows a hollow adherence to tradition and at the same time refuses to perform any sort of working through the past, any process of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*.

We first encounter the father in an early flashback scene in which Juliane and Marianne are little girls, sitting at the dinner table, while the father is saying grace. It is interesting to analyze this prayer, because once we have ascertained a more complete picture of the father, we come to realize how empty his words are, devoid of the meaning they purport to provide. The prayer starts out: “Du hast uns erlöst aus langer, selbstverschuldeter Knechtschaft.” Keeping in mind the time frame of this sequence, presumably either during the final years of the war or immediately thereafter, the word *Knechtschaft* strikes a particularly disturbing tone, as does the word *Erlösung*, for the use of these words stands in stark contrast to the reality of the situation, in which the father is a member of the perpetrators, not the victims, and is hardly the one who needs to be seeking redemption from his enslavement. The father is not a *Knecht*, but rather the victims of the war are Germany’s *Knechte*. It is also the victims that are desperately seeking *Erlösung*, not the Germans. Within the Christian tradition, prayers based on the biblical account of the Israelites’ escape from Egyptian captivity and their arrival in the Promised Land are by no means uncommon.<sup>32</sup> However, while this might be a common

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<sup>31</sup> The connection between the church and Hitler was first mentioned by Linville in the chapter discussing the movie *Peppermint Peace*. The film was largely a critique of the Catholic Church during and after WW2. *Peppermint Peace* was released in 1983 and was directed by Marianne Rosenbaum.

<sup>32</sup> Promised Land: Land promised to the Israelites by God in Genesis 15:13-21 and later again in Deuteronomy 1:8.

start to a prayer, it also demonstrates the father's lack of self-reflection, in that he is not able to see that these words conflict with the current political situation in which he is speaking, not realizing that in saying this prayer, he is claiming innocence rather than acknowledging that his role parallels the position of power held by an *Egyptian*. His inability to connect prayer to the current situation renders his prayer hollow. Professor of theology Johann Baptist Metz addresses the need for prayer to address the horrors of the Holocaust; he states that prayer needs to be in keeping with the current political situation or it becomes meaningless: "Auschwitz signaled a horror that [...] makes every noncontextual talk about God appear empty and blind. [...] [Prayer either has to] speak of the [...] promises of a comprehensive justice, which touches on the suffering of the past, or it is empty" (611-612). The father's prayer, in failing to allow religion and the past to intersect, in continuing his *noncontextual* talk of God, has become meaningless and empty.

The father goes on to pray: „Für unsere Irrtümer schenke uns Einsicht und Reue für unsere Schuld.“ These notions of insight and remorse stand in stark contrast to the attitude we see the father displaying later on in the film, most notably, when he is at the school showing *Nacht und Nebel* to the students. In that scene, his gaze is firmly planted on the students; never views the film himself and thus, it is implied, never questions his own guilt and his own involvement in the atrocities being shown. He stands aside from the screen, removing himself from the visual realm of guilt, yet through his gaze he is willing to blame the children sitting in the room, to pass on the guilt to them. Clearly, he is not showing any *Reue* for his actions nor seeking true *Einsicht* into the horrors of the

Holocaust. This reading of the scene is echoed by Susan Linville in her description of the same scene:

Pastor Klein is shown standing beside the projector in two separate shots, controlling the cinematic apparatus and taking charge of students' moral education. That he perceives his own position as unassailable is suggested by his surveillance of the spectators, over whom his is "keeping watch" – a phrase borrowed from *Night and Fog*<sup>33</sup> – and whom he seems to watch more intently than he does the film. [...] We see little or no personal engagement on his part. (Linville, *Feminism* 100)

The wide angle of the shot is also important, for it allows us to simultaneously view the footage of *Nacht und Nebel* and yet also see the father standing next to the screen. While he may be attempting to remove himself from a position of guilt by looking at the students, from the students', and thus from the viewer's, vantage point, he is being directly equated with the guilt. We cannot look at the screen and not see the father; it is as if for every atrocity shown, the perpetrator, the father, is standing right next to the action, thereby being inserted into the action of the documentary. When the documentary poses the question of guilt, asking, "Wer ist schuldig?", we see the people in the documentary all deny their guilt, despite obvious contradictions, all proclaiming, "Ich bin nicht schuldig!" During this scene in von Trotta's film, it appears as though the father is the one being asked about his guilt and he tries to claim innocence by looking away from the screen. Yet in doing so, his denial of guilt becomes utterly unconvincing.

James Skidmore, in his article "Intellectualism and Emotionalism in Margarete von Trotta's *Die Bleierne Zeit*", argues to the contrary, saying that:

The pastor is an old-fashioned patriarch [...]. But he is also a member of the war generation who, just after the war, makes a direct reference to German guilt in the prayer cited above. This is the type of bold acknowledgement that few Germans

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<sup>33</sup> *Night and Fog*: English title of *Nacht und Nebel*, from the French *Nuit et brouillard*.

of his generation could make at the time, and it is the minimal admission of guilt that the 68ers demanded of their country. (560)

I strongly disagree with Skidmore's reading of the prayer; his analysis does not seem to make sense and instead would indicate an attempt to redeem the father's position, despite all evidence to the contrary. Skidmore's use of the description *bold* is worrisome as well, for how the use of the noncontextual terms *Einsicht* and *Reue*, even if they were an admission of Nazi guilt - which they are not - could be construed as a *bold* admission is unclear. It seems highly unlikely that the 68ers, nor the viewers, would find this to be a sufficient admittance of guilt.<sup>34</sup> Instead, I would argue the prayer scene is used within the film to highlight exactly the opposite, namely the father's refusal to admit any guilt on his part. While the father's relationship with the church enables him to avoid a direct confrontation with guilt, claiming innocence because he was never a soldier, the film makes it clear that his inaction during the war does not absolve him from needing to address questions of guilt.

In a later scene, we see the family again at the dinner table, this time having lunch, during which the father and Julianne get into an argument because Julianne insists on wearing black jeans to school, which the father finds unacceptable. He demands that she wears skirts and questions why the mother is not doing her job in raising the daughter properly, asking, "Kannst du nicht dafür Sorgen, dass sie morgens im Rock das Haus verlässt?" This scene clearly demonstrates not only the conservative values that the father holds, but the strong patriarchal dominance that he tries to exert over his family. While E. Ann Kaplan describes this depiction of the father as a "subtle critique of the patriarchal family through [the exposure of] the pompous authoritarianism of the sisters'

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<sup>34</sup> 68ers is the term commonly used to refer to the members of the student protest in 1968.

father” (“Discourses of Terrorism” 117), there is nothing truly subtle about the critique of the patriarchal family structure. Throughout the flashback scenes, the family is depicted as suffering under the authority of their dominant father. Furthermore, as grown-ups, we see both sisters vehemently fighting against the continuation of this family model, either by deciding not to have children, as is the case with Juliane, or by abandoning her child, as does Marianne.

It is interesting to note that over time, the position that the father holds changes the beliefs of the mother as well. While in the flashbacks she still appears to be supportive of her husband, later on she describes him as egotistical in a scene in which she is talking with Juliane: “Immer wenn ich an ihn denke, sage ich nicht Vater, oder Unser Vater, sondern nur, der Egoist.” This scene is particularly interesting because we can see that the language used is purposefully vague. Is she simply talking about her husband or is she also talking about God and the church as well? The reference to “Unser Vater” is reminiscent of the beginning of the *Vaterunser*,<sup>35</sup> leading us to realize that the two are inextricably linked and, from the mother’s point of view, both have become something with which she can no longer identify, something which seems empty and self-serving to her. The church, and thus society, have become egotistical, placing their own interests ahead of the needs of its members. Church and society both continue to ignore people’s need to address their inherited guilt and refuse to institute radical changes because these changes would alter the established way of life and threaten the positions of power they hold within society.

The father’s insistence on patriarchy and tradition causes the daughters, and eventually the mother, to rebel and break away. This process begins early for Juliane,

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<sup>35</sup> The Lord’s Prayer; prayer Jesus taught his disciples, found in the Bible, Book of Matthew 6: 9-13.

who rebels against her father's authority in her teenage years. Juliane is depicted as actively engaging with Germany's tainted past, against the will of her father and her teachers at school. For example, Juliane refuses to recite a poem by Rilke, instead asking why they are not focusing on Brecht's *Ballade von der Judenhure Marie Sanders*, a poem about a German woman tormented for loving a Jewish man, or Celan's *Todesfuge*, a poem about the concentration camps. Juliane's desire to discuss what is truly applicable to their lives and their recent past is not tolerated; she is forced to leave class.

Unlike her sister, Marianne's process of breaking away from the father occurs off-screen, presumably sometime between her early teenage years and when we encounter her again in her early thirties. In her early teenage years, Marianne is still depicted as her father's darling. While we already sense that she does not agree with her father's behavior and views, she has learned how to mollify him. But by the time we encounter Marianne as an adult on-screen, she has become a terrorist and we are informed of the severed relationship between her and her father through the mother: "Ich glaube, wenn sie nur tot wäre, könnte er sie wieder lieben." Clearly, his love for his daughter failed to be unconditional; once she chooses to follow her own path, he no longer shows affection towards her. Thus, the father's staunch adherence to authoritarian patriarchy causes his daughters to shun him once they have managed to escape from his control. His last name, Klein, reflects the dual position he inhabits; on the one hand, the father holds positions of power, but on the other hand, in the eyes of his family, he has become insignificant and *klein*.

Through flashback scenes of the sisters' childhood we gain a strong sense of the father's aggressive nature and the connection that is being made between his oppressive

nature and society's oppressive past. By vilifying him, the film is able to express anger towards the Nazi past and bring to the forefront the feeling that the authoritarian nature of the Nazi period has not been sufficiently purged from society. These flashbacks are therefore vital in establishing a more complete understanding of the sisters. By understanding their relationship with their father, we come to understand their relationship with society and thereby gain access to their motivations for rebellion. They are not merely rebelling against the father, but, rather, against all that he stands for; they are rebelling against a society that continues to be contaminated by fascist ideology. Contrary to what E. Ann Kaplan argues in saying that "the discourse of the family [...] contained within the flashbacks functions on the periphery of the narrative: their reason for being is unclear" ("Discourses of Terrorism" 116), I would argue that these flashbacks are central to the story; without them, the narration would not be complete. The flashbacks provide the background information needed to analyze the sisters' actions and understand their contempt for German society. They allow for the realization that all institutions within German society, be it the family, church, or school, continue to serve as means of oppression, much as they did during the Third Reich; change is vehemently needed.

The father and the church are defined by their irrelevance because of their failure to contextualize their beliefs within the framework of Germany's past. Their adherence to outdated structures of authoritarianism renders them obsolete and meaningless. Meaning, however, is exactly what Marianne craves from early childhood on, her greatest fear being that of a meaningless life. In one scene we see Marianne and Juliane speaking together as teenagers and Marianne talks about wanting to go to Africa to help people.



Mocked by Juliane, she cries out: “Ich möchte gebraucht werden! Ich möchte zu etwas nutze sein!” It is this desire to bring about change in the world that ultimately leads her to take drastic action and commit acts of terrorism. Justification for this desire to act is found in Christian symbolism for her – Christ’s willingness to take on the world and fight, and ultimately die, for his belief in the need for social change. Marianne strongly identifies with Christ’s life: not the theology connected with Christ, but rather his unwavering belief in helping others. However misled in her implementations of these ideas, she shows a willingness to do whatever it takes, risking confinement or death, in order to help those she deems in need of rescue. Her desire to be useful to others and live a meaningful life is verbalized when she comments on the suicide of her former partner Werner, saying, “Wie kann man sein Leben auslöschen, ohne es überhaupt eingesetzt zu haben?” Marianne isn’t just questioning Werner’s motivations; rather, this question reflects her insistence on living life with purpose. Marianne argues that by taking action, her life will not be lived in vain. E. Ann Kaplan comments on the discussion mentioned above between Juliane and Marianne and states, “Juliane’s cynical existentialism seems healthier than Marianne’s intense desire to serve mankind” (*Women & Film* 109). Kaplan fails to explain how she came to this conclusion and while Marianne’s later terrorist actions are undoubtedly condemnable, I would argue that this desire of hers to help others is valued exceedingly positively in the film and is connected to Christ’s desire to save the world. Marianne’s desire to help is set in stark contrast to her father’s conspicuous apathy and it is her identification with Christ that I intend to explore below.

In order to understand the identification process that takes place between Marianne and Christ, we first need to examine the image of Christ that serves as the basis

for this connection. The recurring image of Christ in *Die Bleierne Zeit* is a depiction of the crucifixion scene found in their childhood home, portraying a very pale, weak, suffering Christ figure, hanging on the cross, head drooping to the left. Christ's white, starved body is contrasted with the utter darkness that surrounds him in the artwork. Aside from him, all else is black, except for the few mourners, who lay at his feet, blending into the background of darkness. Through the use of color, the image makes clear that despite his suffering, he is also the only one able to provide light in the midst of this darkness, that is to say, his suffering is not in vain, it serves to illuminate the world. This painting of the crucifix clearly has a strong impact on Marianne; her gaze is often transfixed by this image of Christ. Marianne identifies with this illumination of Christ; her desire to bring light into the dark *leaden times* in which she lives finds resonance in the depiction of Christ as bringer of light. Her demand for change and her ultimate willingness to die for her belief is grounded in the conviction that her work will make a difference for others, even if it is not understood right away, much as Christ was not understood during his lifetime: "Warte ab, Jule. Zehn, zwanzig Jahre. Dann erst wirst du beurteilen können." Marianne is not to be seen as a victim, much as Christ was not a victim. She willingly puts herself in the position of danger, actively seeking to change society through terrorist actions, regardless of the consequences. She willingly sacrifices her comfortable existence in order to expose society's shortcomings and bring about change, sacrificing herself along the way, but never becoming a victim. She embodies a "rebel with a cause" (Kuttenberg 124) much as Christ was the prototypal rebel with a cause, eschewing societal norms in order to help others.

One montage of particular importance for establishing Marianne's identification with Christ is as follows: first, the camera passes over the prison grounds in a wide angle shot, surveying the institution in which Marianne is detained. Then we jump to the next scene, a flashback in which a very young Marianne and Juliane are walking up the stairs to their apartment and have to pass the painting of the crucifix, which they try to avoid looking at, but to which their gaze is drawn. They stare at it, take it in and are visibly moved by it. Here the juxtaposition between Marianne's childhood innocence and Marianne's later suffering is highlighted. Like Christ, she was innocent, but because of the burden she felt placed upon her, namely Germany's guilt for the Holocaust, she takes action and later suffers greatly in prison for it. While her innocence is arguably lost once she becomes active as a terrorist, her destruction is not random. Like Christ, who broke laws in order to expose the corruption of his society, Marianne likewise takes action in order to point out society's flaws; only she resorts to drastically different means than those employed by Christ.

The motif of Marianne as a suffering Christ ultimately culminates in the scene in which Marianne's mangled, tortured corpse is shown after her alleged suicide. The scene then switches to a dream sequence and we see Marianne and Juliane, as little children, standing shoulder to shoulder. The scene is completely overshadowed by a blood red glow, and we see the girls once again standing in front of the crucifix, staring at it, tears in their eyes, examining the tortured body, and as viewers, we are unable to separate this tormented body from Marianne's tormented body that we have just seen. Then the shot switches to a low angle shot of their father, high up in the pulpit, screaming down at them, arms waving frantically, as if to try to capture them, highlighting the father's

aggressive authoritarian behavior and condemnation of Marianne. But while Marianne's actions are condemned by many, we are assured of solidarity between the sisters, standing close together, and are left with the sense that it is the father figure, the church, and society, who are the culprits of the violence that Marianne has to fight against. Cecilia Sjöholm agrees with this reading of Marianne's actions as a fight against the violence of the 'father': "[Terrorism] is more or less explicitly exposed as a reaction to a certain persistence of violence underneath the surface of contemporary society, a violence in which the state, the media, and the repressive morality of the petite bourgeoisie are complicit" (111). Marianne, by taking action and actively addressing the inherited guilt and continued corruption of German society, suffers injustice and meets a gruesome death by being hanged. Yet, I would argue that she has found fulfillment in death. She dies believing that she has made a difference; she dies fighting for a better future for society, fighting against the current regime that continues to be impregnated by National Socialist ideals and continues to be run by ex-Nazis who have come back into power.<sup>36</sup>

This argument for understanding the depiction of Marianne's corpse as a Christ-figure is reinforced by others' reactions to seeing her, namely those of Juliane and the father. Up until Marianne's death, Marianne's ideals have barely influenced Juliane. The attention that Juliane gives Marianne is primarily based on their shared history of growing up together, of being sisters. Juliane maintains her distance, emotionally and intellectually. However, that all changes after she views her sister's mangled corpse. She suffers a nervous breakdown, and, after recovering, she sacrifices her relationship with her sympathetic partner Wolfgang and her work as a journalist in order to research and

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<sup>36</sup> Much has been written on this topic of perceived continuation of NS society. For an overview, see Michael Schneider's essay "Fathers and Sons, Respectively: The Damaged Relationship between Two Generations", p.6-18.

document her sister's life and death. I would argue that the extent to which she allows her sister's death to affect her is directly linked to what she sees when she looks at her sister: namely, a suffering Christ. In seeing her sister in the coffin, she sees more than just her sister; she sees a suffering individual who has died in a fight for others, who has died trying to help change society. In this moment Marianne's quest becomes clear to Juliane and the image of her tortured body is powerful enough to change Juliane. It is precisely the image of Marianne, not Marianne herself, which is able to institute this change. The image overcomes the boundary set up between the sisters. This deep connection that is established between Marianne as image and Christ as image is also noted by E. Ann Kaplan:

In all cases, Juliane is a passive spectator of these violent images [of the body]. [First it is] the image of the bloodied body of Christ in the painting outside the family door. [...] [Then there is another] damaged [body] that she has to confront and that provides links back to the earlier (more distanced) representation (i.e., in art). [...] The image [is] of Marianne's own bruised, battered body, her face beyond recognition in the coffin. ("Discourses of Terrorism" 118)

The violence and pain associated with the image of Christ on the cross, and later Marianne in the coffin, force Juliane to see the connection between the two. Marianne's struggles are validated, for she has become more than just an individual; she has become an image that holds the power to affect others and causes them to see themselves in her image. In accordance with my reading, Renate Hehr states that: "[After Marianne's death], Juliane begins to identify with her sister completely" (29). By seeing her sister as image, she is able to identify in a different way than was possible during Marianne's life and it is this identification which explains her subsequent actions. For while it is the painting of Christ that provides Marianne with the impetus to act, it is the image of Marianne which motivates Juliane to act.

The father's reaction to seeing Marianne is markedly different than that of Juliane. Both parents remain surprisingly composed; the mother however shows more painful emotion and in her pain, begins to recite a prayer. The father merely stands still, staring at his daughter with an expression of disgust. Nothing in his expression softens, as one might initially expect. Rather, he looks around at the guards and one can't help but notice his feeling of being humiliated by his daughter. Her death is disrespectful, shameful. The importance in understanding this scene is in understanding the connection that has been made between the father and church as corrupt entities; he is the modern representation of a Pharisee in Christ's time. In understanding this image of Marianne as a Christ-figure, we then need to understand the reaction that the Pharisees had towards Christ's death. Dying on a cross was the most shameful death sentence to which one could be subjected in Christ's time; Christ's death was meant to be shameful. The Pharisees saw the cross and failed to see what others saw; all they saw was humiliation. Likewise, Marianne's 'suicide' carries the same stigma of shame. It should then not be surprising that the father, a modern day Pharisee, sees this death as humiliating for his family, for ironically enough he is unable to see what Juliane sees; he is blinded by his traditional view of the world.

For Marianne, Germany's past is personal. Her life has been lived in the shadow of Germany's horrifying past; the past has infiltrated every aspect of her life. Marianne's desire to make a difference causes her to embrace terrorist ideals in order to achieve more immediate results; she does not have her sister's patience to take small steps towards change. From early on Marianne exhibits a desire to lead a meaningful life, something that is not found in the actions of the church, but in identification with Christ; for surely if

anyone led a meaningful life, it was he. Von Trotta's depictions of the father and the church expose both as empty façades, which fail to let go of their rigid authority or to care about others in clinging to tradition. The church has forgotten about its revolutionary history, forgotten about the power it once held to question society, forgotten that it was created after Christ's death to provide a countermovement against the corrupted world. The church of *Die Bleierne Zeit* no longer has any revolutionary power. Juxtaposed with this is Marianne who, because despite all her faults, cares deeply about those in need and wants to make a difference. However misguided, at least she fights against society's ignorance of the past and society's refusal to adequately change and thereby preclude another Holocaust from happen. Marianne sees past the church's inaction and finds a revolutionary symbol in the image of Christ. Her identification with him inspires her to take action, to risk everything. By doing so, she is able to live in accordance with her beliefs; she lives out what really matters to her, even if this challenges the norms held by society. Setting up a dichotomy between Christ and the church shows the potential of finding inspiration within the Christian canon, in the figure of Christ, without needing to adhere to church traditions. In Christ, Marianne finds a fellow rebel; in the church, she finds apathy.

One of Marianne's most interesting lines comes in the form of the conventional expression: "Schlaf schön weiter." The sarcastic tone used in saying this to Juliane is vital for understanding just how much more is being said than is suggested at first glance. *Schlaf schön weiter*. Through this utterance, we come to understand Marianne's frustration with her sister and with society. Marianne's rebellion is a rebellion precisely against this sleep, against the apathy that she sees all around her. Most people are

sleeping through their lives, never questioning society, never taking action against injustice. Marianne has no interest in sleep. By living outside of society, through her radical actions, she remains vigilant. While her actions are not condoned, her determination to live life with purpose is; she has become a symbol in the likeness of Christ. Like him, she is willing to stand up to authority. Christ took to the streets, he acted, and he brought about change. She too wants to take action, wants to stay awake. She refuses to be lured into a sweet dream, a gentle sleep. Yet paradoxically, in her attempt to stay awake, sleep is ushered in much sooner than she had imagined. Her personal revolution fails, but through her image of a Christ in death, she is able to keep her quest for change alive.



## CHAPTER 3

### Crafting an Identity: Exploring Inherited Victimization in Anne Karpf's *The War After: Living with the Holocaust*

Anne Karpf published her family memoir *The War After: Living with the Holocaust* in 1996, in which she recounts her experience of growing up in London as the child of Holocaust survivors. Despite the great depth and insight that the book offers, practically no secondary literature exists on the text; it would appear that while the book enjoyed success within the genre of memoirs, it failed to elicit the attention of literary scholars, perhaps due to the fact that it appeared nearly a decade after most other family memoirs by second-generation authors had been written. The only mention of Karpf found in secondary literature is in the work of Erin McGlothlin's *Second-Generation Holocaust Literature*. In her introduction, McGlothlin praises Karpf's work, arguing that it "documents her attempt to come to grips with an unlived past that powerfully affects her life in the present," and that in doing so, Karpf's work is representative of her generation, a generation that "feels marked by the continued presence of the Holocaust past" (5). Yet McGlothlin does not further expound upon Karpf's work and instead moves on to the analysis of other works. While overlooked, I feel that Karpf's work deserves attention; her ability to interweave memory and narrative, her direct, blunt language, and her use of unexpected imagery sets her text apart from traditional autobiography and allows for interpretation and extrapolation.

The main focus of the narration lies in Karpf's struggle to establish her identity as she is torn between her strong identification with the Holocaust and her desire to establish an identity not solely based on her inherited legacy of trauma and victimization. Interesting for my research is Karpf's explicit identification with Christ through the appearance of stigmata. This identification is unexpected, considering her Jewish background, and thus worthy of examination. In order to understand the appearance of stigmata, I will begin by exploring the origins of Karpf's identity crisis and then will examine her identification with Christ. I argue that Karpf is able to find a symbiosis between the two dueling poles that previously divide her identity by identifying with Christ as past suffer and as social rebel.

I am drawn to Anne Karpf's work because she provides a fascinating counterpoint to the works I have previously explored. Having looked at the works of Anne Duden and Margerethe von Trotta, both representatives of second-generation perpetrator literature, whose main struggles are against the continued silence of German society and particularly that of their parents' generation, Anne Karpf provides an interesting counter perspective, namely that of second-generation survivor literature. Karpf's struggles are markedly different than those of Duden and von Trotta, in that her world is dominated by her inherited legacy of victimization and an almost overwhelming saturation of discussion about the Holocaust; silence does not exist in regards to the past. Her parents not only speak of the Holocaust, but speak of it with such frequency that it comes to affect every aspect of their daughter's life. The title of her book makes direct reference to this over-saturation of the past: *The War After: Living with the Holocaust*. Ernst van Alphen, in his essay "Second-Generation Testimony, Transmission of Trauma, and

Postmemory,” argues that this “obsessive telling” of the past is exceedingly common among Holocaust survivors: “[They] feel compelled to tell the details of [their] ordeal and cannot stop talking about it. Any daily event or situation in post-Holocaust life invariably evokes [...] the urge to go back to the past and relate it to [their family]” (478). He observes that the constant recounting of the past negatively impacts the children of survivors; as is the case with Karpf. For her, the Holocaust is not a completed, isolated event, for it continues every day in the minds of her family. It becomes a force to be reckoned with; it is ever present and constantly requires acknowledgement. Karpf describes this constant presence as a fog that looms over their home:

I can’t remember when we were first told about the war. I sometimes think that maybe we were never told about the war; it just seeped into our home, like some peculiarly mobile fog, and took up residence. The house and our parents seemed layered with a kind of subcutaneous sadness. (4)

While her world is dominated by discussions of the Holocaust, through her use of the word *fog* to describe her home and her relationship with her parents, it becomes clear that simply talking about the past does not necessarily bring clarity to her life. Rather, the presence of the *war* in their home adds to her confusion and causes her to feel separated from her parents; they are unreachable, always separated from her by a *layer of sadness*. Their legacy, despite being discussed, is not available to their daughter and serves to alienate Karpf from her parents; she is left alone in the *fog*, unable to see the paths available to her.

Karpf’s alienation is not only felt within her family, but it is also experienced as an alienation from society, for the *fog* is specific to their *home* alone. The *fog* has selected their home to *take up residence*, thereby implying that other homes do not suffer in the same manner. As a member of the Jewish diaspora, Karpf’s Jewish heritage clearly sets

her apart from her British contemporaries and causes her to feel lost and disoriented. Despite being born in England and having lived there, her family legacy and their home atmosphere, described as the “mittelEuropean knädel-and-strudel atmosphere of home,” is set in stark contrast to the British homes of others, which seem “utterly alien” to her (6). Karpf is raised to understand that the outside world is not her family’s world; they do not belong to British society. She notes that, “looking back, it sometimes seems as if we’d been cast adrift in Britain, or abandoned on one bank of a river with all our necessities on the other” (5). Karpf’s sense of alienation from British culture is intensified by her family’s insistence on maintaining a strong division between themselves and non-Jews. Karpf recounts how her parents would tell the cautionary tale of a Jewish woman who married a man who was not Jewish, who was “quite happy to go along with his Jewish wife’s desire to bring the children up as Jews until one of the kids has a life-threatening fever, whereupon the husband whisks him out of bed and takes him off to a priest to be baptized. When the chips were down, they told us, you couldn’t trust them” (97). The parent’s insistence on the division between *us* and *them* inevitably reinforces their legacy of oppression, only now, the parents are willingly separating themselves from society.

Karpf’s parents, who are both Jewish, suffered tremendously during the war, a fact that is important for understanding the family dynamics and Karpf’s intense identification with the Holocaust. In *The War After: Living with the Holocaust*, Karpf interviews her parents over the course of many years, asking them to recount their life experiences. Karpf only occasionally interrupts her parents during the interviews to clarify information; for the most part, they are given the freedom to speak at length and

thereby give uninterrupted autobiographical account of their lives before, during, and after the war, which Karpf directly transcribes. Her parents' autobiographies account for several chapters of her book and arguably transform *The War After* into a family biography more than an autobiography. From her parents' accounts, we find out that Karpf's mother is nearly beaten to death by the Gestapo, many family members are killed, including the mother's first husband and her father, and she is shipped off to several concentration camps, including Auschwitz-Birkenau, which she barely survives. Karpf's father also suffers immense physical and mental anguish during the war. He is taken from his home at night and deported to a Siberian work-camp, where he suffers from starvation and physical anguish from the forced labor required of him. Following the war, Karpf's parents get married, leave Poland because of its rising anti-Semitism and settle in London, where their two daughters are born and raised. The children grow up with an acute knowledge of their parents' past suffering; talk of the war and their deceased relatives is commonplace: "We were told stories about the war, and saw the number inked into my mother's arm. [...] I do know that death was alive and present in our home. [...] They would point out who was who [in photo albums] and how they died. With so few living relatives, dead ones had to suffice" (5). Marianne Hirsch, author of *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory*, discusses the importance that photographs hold in the "lives shaped by exile, emigration and relocation [...] where relatives are dispersed and relationships shattered, photographs provide perhaps even more than usual some illusion of continuity over time and space" (xi). However, while the photographs of Karpf's relatives are intended to provide Karpf with a sense of extended family and an *illusion of continuity*, in reality they have the opposite effect,

emphasizing the “torn legacy” (McGlothlin 24) of her family’s history and serving as a constant reminder of the loss and death that her family has experienced. Hirsch goes on to note that “it is precisely the utter conventionality of the domestic family picture that makes it impossible to comprehend how the person in the picture was, or could have been, annihilated” (21). The ease with which Karpf’s parents recount the stories of the death of their relatives leaves Karpf confused, unable to process the information, and unable to place the Holocaust within a historical framework, which she addresses, saying that “the Holocaust was epic, but for us it was also domestic” (96). Through the photo album, the brutalization of the war remains present at all times and becomes an everyday household affair.

Karpf is raised in a world in which the Holocaust is ever present and is often spoken about. She describes the Holocaust as her family’s version of a fairy-tale, stating:

Other children were presumably told stories about goblins, monsters, and wicked witches; we learned about the Nazis. And while their heroes and heroines must have fled from castles and dungeons, the few I remember had escaped from ghettos, concentration camps, and forced labour camps. [...] No fictional evil could have possibly rivaled the documentary version so often recounted to us. (94)

The use of the term *fairy-tale* indicates the relative ease with which Karpf’s parents recount their experiences of the Holocaust. Yet, as van Alphen notes, fairy-tales are normally defined by their depiction of life in such a way that the “conditions of the world are fundamentally different from the [listeners] world” (“Testimony” 480), thus allowing a lesson to be imparted without conveying a sense of imminent danger. Fairy-tales are not supposed to mirror reality; they are meant to “contradict [the listeners] frame of reference of reality and normality” (van Alphen 481). This, however, is not the case for Karpf; the fairy-tales of her childhood cannot be separated from reality, for she is aware that the

stories did in fact take place. Thus, she is taught a worrisome lesson, for she is raised with the belief that evil is real and ever present and can attack at any moment. By blurring the lines between fictional and factual, Karpf's parents fail to equip their children with the ability to accurately judge the world, for while other fairy-tales allow children to understand that evil is *make-believe* and that the children's world is not that of the tales, for *goblins* and *monsters* clearly do not exist, Karpf is not given that reassurance. For her, evil is always lurking; you just never know in what form it will appear.

But while the Holocaust is ever present in speech, it is also a part of her family's history from which Karpf is complete divorced, having never experienced the suffering firsthand.<sup>37</sup> The Holocaust becomes a force that shapes her life and her identity, but at the same time it is an event that she had no part in, as she was born years after the conclusion of the war, and thus Karpf never actually suffered under the oppressive Nazi regime. The events of the Holocaust were and always will be completely out of her control: "Her sense of self is built not on her own life experience but rather on a largely unknown event that preceded her birth" (McGlothlin 1). Marianne Hirsch describes this phenomenon as suffering from *postmemory*, which she argues is "distinguished from memory by generational distance and from history by deep personal connection. [...] Postmemory characterizes the experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth" (22). *Postmemory* accurately describes Karpf's relationship to the past, in which she feels deeply connected to her family's experiences during the Holocaust, even though she was not born until after the end of the war, yet the Holocaust

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<sup>37</sup> Numerous examples of the constant presence of the Holocaust are mentioned in Karpf's memoir. Examples include her mention of "being raised on stories about the fractures in our parents' lives" (8), but also in more specific terms, she discusses her inability to reproach her mother because of her father urging that Karpf "remember what she's been through" (38).

bears far greater significance for her than simply being relegated to history, for it continues to affect her daily existence. For Karpf, tension arises due to the dilemma of how to define an identity which is intricately tied to an event for which you were not present. Can one ever escape from living in the shadows of the past?

The ever-felt presence of the Holocaust and the suffering that it caused her parents initially leads Karpf to completely structure her identity around the identity of her parents as Holocaust survivors. In doing so, she attempts to bridge the gap in order to permeate the *layers of sadness* that separate her from her parents and hopes that through this, she will be able to rid herself of the feeling of alienation from which she suffers. Her parents' stories of suffering become the basis for her identity; she sees the world in the same way that her parents view it and seeks to embody their experience. "My parents were coterminous with me – we were unicellular, an atom" (102). In her description of British society she equates her and her parents' perceptions of society, stating: "My parents experienced the post-war world as cold, both in their bodies and minds. ... I, as a result and not a cause of my parents' concern, [also] felt constantly cold or, if I didn't, was anxious that I might" (4). Karpf's childhood is marked by a seriousness that others do not have; she exhibits an abnormal obsession with death and an extreme fear of departures: "It seemed as if from birth I was obsessed with death" (5). She comments that she "had no notion of ebb and flow, or trust in reunion [...] I treated all partings as if they were final: wherever you are going, you might never come back. [...] It was as if my parents' experience had become my own; I'd soaked up their fear of loss" (44). This quote clearly demonstrates the extent to which she has incorporated her parents' worldview. Their continued fear of loss due to actual losses in the past has been passed



on to their daughter, but while Karpf has inherited their fear, she has never experienced any losses firsthand; her debilitating fear of loss is not based on her life experience in Britain. Her identification culminates in her utter inability to leave her parents' home, even at an age in which most grown-up children have left home and live on their own. In describing the prospect, she says, "Leaving home was always frightening and felt wrenching: it wasn't so much leaving as a forcible extraction" (7). In this quote, her use of the words *forcible extraction* allows us to see yet another level of identification with her parents' history, for her parents were forcibly extracted from their homes. Karpf, in response to this knowledge, refuses to leave home and thus also refuses to symbolically recreate an act they forever mourn. The problem arises in that Karpf has not experienced these events; as much as she identifies with her parents' struggles, the struggles belong to her parents alone, not to her. Her identity is built upon an inherited past, not an actual lived past. McGlothlin describes Karpf's identity struggles by saying that "her difficulty in claiming an independent identity is thus compounded by the uncanny feeling that she is forever cut off from the meaning of a past event that grounds her present life" (2). While her actions may resemble those of her parents, she does not have the life experience to base them on, rendering them empty recreations, devoid of a referent.

Growing up, Karpf struggles to make sense of the role that the Holocaust has played in her life. Compounding her struggles to do so are her parents' attempts to put her negative emotions in perspective, downplaying any dilemmas she faces as irrelevant:

For my parents the war was the yardstick by which all other bad experiences were judged and thereby found to be relatively good. Frustration, irritation, anger, disappointment – to them all these seemed trivial and indulgent, and so never could be freely vented. My repertoire of tolerable emotions became minimal. (39)

Her parents' determination to offer their children a good life is misguided in their attempt to ensure happiness by banning negative emotions rather than allowing the children to express their true feelings, even if their sadness is caused by a lesser evil than that which the parents had to face. Karpf reflects back on her parents' restrictive behavior, noting: "When, decades later, a friend asked if I'd actually felt unhappy as a child or only retrospectively imputed it, I didn't understand why I couldn't answer until I realized that being unhappy simply hadn't been contemplatable. It wasn't a permissible emotion" (10). Compared to her parents' suffering, the emotional turmoil she experiences because of her confused identity is downplayed as insignificant; her demand to have her feelings acknowledged by her parents is denied.

It is important to note is the differentiation that needs to be made between identification and identity in order to understand Karpf's inner turmoil. Identification is the process of emotionally attaching to a referent; identity is a collection of identifications and lived experiences. Karpf struggles to try to make sense of her identity in light of the fact that she completely identifies with a past which is not her past. While Karpf fully identifies with her parent's Holocaust experience, this identification does not justify Karpf's identity, a fact that she is well aware of, because despite identifying with the past, her life is devoid of lived Holocaust experiences; her actual experiences in life do not match those of her parents. She knows that she did not experience the Holocaust and thus understands that it is not reasonable to have an unlived event as the basis for her identity; she should not identify as a Holocaust survivor, but it is none the less the way she feels because of how she was raised. Karpf struggles to find a way to incorporate this

intense identification into an identity that fits who she is – a second-generation Holocaust survivor.

At first, Karpf finds herself incapable of forming an identity apart from her parents' history, yet she is also not able to truly identify with their suffering. She feels isolated from both worlds, belonging neither to her parents' generation nor feeling the carefree nature of her British peers. In an attempt to gain control, she tries to internalize the suffering of her parents through self-inflicted discomfort, hoping that this might validate her claim to their past:

I would set myself a rigid, minute-by-minute schedule. [...] Eventually I'd emerge and then immediately introduce another punitive regime – I could sit at my desk for six or more hours without allowing myself even to pee – until the whole cycle began again. The war was now within. (54)

Karpf attempts to find validity for her identification by inflicting physical agony upon herself; yet she fails to gain the justification she is longing for. She realizes that the “traumatic events [of her parents' lives] cannot be recreated” (Hirsch 22) and instead is left with the sense of not being real, of not having a real identity: “It's perhaps not surprising that I was sometimes left with a curious sense of not being real. [It was] a passing sensation ... of being outside my body” (40). Her attempt to internalize the *war* and thereby internalize her parents' suffering does not produce the desired results; her imposed suffering neither produces a justification for an identity as a victim of the Holocaust, nor does it allow her to break through the *sadness* to reach her parents. She continues to feel isolated.

Karpf suffers from an identity crisis. On the one hand, she cannot let go of her identification with the Holocaust, as it has been such a shaping force. On the other hand, she is shamed by the fact that she cannot break free and wishes that she could define

herself apart from her parents' lives, as all of her peers have done. This conflict manifests itself physically; in the text we suddenly encounter a moment of identification with Christ in which Karpf self-inflicts wounds resembling stigmata:

I tried repeatedly to reconcile these warring views until, eventually, it all extruded through my hands, unerring somatic proof that I couldn't in fact handle it. Beads of moisture appeared, trapped beneath the skin, on the palm of one hand, and with them came a compelling urge to scratch. Then I started to claw at my left hand with the nails of my right until the blood ran. This mania of scratching continued until the whole surface of the hand turned raging, stinging scarlet. [...] They seemed like self-inflicted stigmata. (98)

This mention of stigmata is what awakened my interest in Karpf's work, for their appearance is unexpected due to her Jewish background. The question that then arises is: What aspect of Christ does she appropriate and to what end? I argue that the importance lies not in the fact that Karpf uses Christian symbolism, but rather what aspect of Christ she chooses to focus on, namely the image of stigmata. Her appropriation of the image of stigmata, as opposed to that of the crucifix, signals a difference in intention and understanding the symbolism behind the stigmata is fundamental to our understanding of her identity formation.

While stigmata have a long history, particularly within the Catholic Church, I would argue that the use of stigmata in Karpf is divorced from this Catholic history and instead needs to be read as a reference to the original sufferer of stigmata: namely Christ. McGlothlin also argues that the stigmata evoke images of Christ, not the Catholic Church: "She designates her wounds stigmata, a term that bears powerful connotations, evoking the [...] suffering in the figure of Jesus, whose wounds of crucifixion are resembled by Karpf's own hands" (3). It is vital to our understanding of stigmata to differentiate between the relevance of Christ's stigmata and the meaning that the Catholic

Church has given them, for the two are drastically different. Whereas the Catholic Church has made stigmata into a supernatural outward appearance of inner pietism, Christ's stigmata served a more simple purpose, namely that of identification. We see this in the Bible in John 20: 20-29, where Christ reveals his hands to the disciples, showing his stigmata and thereby identifies himself as the one who suffered on the cross.<sup>38</sup> The important detail to note is that the stigmata serve to tie Christ to a past, concluded suffering, not a current suffering. This idea of suffering divorced from the present moment sets the symbolism of stigmata drastically apart from symbolism of the crucifix, in which the suffering is present and on-going. This difference in temporality is central to understanding the implications of the stigmata for Karpf's identity; by appropriating stigmata, she is asserting her connection to past suffering, without making the claim that the past suffering is present, as opposed to the image which the crucifix conveys, in which suffering is acutely present yet lacks the ability to convey notions of suffering that took place in the past.

Understanding Christ's stigmata as both referring back to a past suffering and serving to identify oneself in the present, I would argue that Karpf's use of stigmata serves these exact purposes. Through her stigmata, she is able to identify herself as someone who is connected to a past suffering, and she is finally able to give credence to the impact that the Holocaust has had on her. It allows her to accept her identity as one

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<sup>38</sup> John 20: 19-20: On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

John 20: 24-27: Now Thomas, one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. <sup>25</sup>So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it." [...]

<sup>27</sup>Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe."

that is influenced by the Holocaust. McGlothlin states that, “Karpf transforms her body into a site marked by a Holocaust trauma that she cannot directly access, a locus of remembrance that has no recourse to lived memory” (3), emphasizing the vital connection between the stigmata and the trauma of the Holocaust. McGlothlin goes on to describe the stigmata as follows:

Her marks are not the physical signifiers of her own personal experiences, but rather are the inherited traces of her parents’ history of trauma and violation, a history that is both known (in the sense that she knows of the event) and at the same time profoundly unknown (in the sense that her knowledge does not derive from personal experience). (7)

While I agree that the stigmata symbolize her inherited trauma and violation, I disagree with McGlothlin’s assertion that the stigmata are not also signifiers of her own experience. For by *self*-inflicting the stigmata, Karpf is physically experiencing trauma, leaving behind an open wound that connects her mind and her body to the Holocaust. Inflicting physical pain thus both grounds her body in the present moment, helping to combat her feeling of *not being real*, and connects her to past suffering.

Furthermore, I argue that the significance of Karpf’s stigmata moves beyond functioning solely as a means of identification with the Holocaust past and enables her to identify with the rebellious character of Christ as well. By doing so, Karpf is able to firmly establish her identity apart from her parents’ worldview. Justification for this argument is found in the events that lead up to the appearance of the stigmata: Karpf goes against her parents’ wishes and begins a relationship with a man who is not Jewish. Initially, Karpf is fearful of her parents’ reaction, knowing that she is violating their rules of maintaining boundaries between *us* and *them*. She withholds information about her new partner, arguing that “the fact that I’d met an attractive and interesting man would be

nothing, I knew, next to the fact that he wasn't Jewish" (97). Yet eventually she tells her parents about her relationship and her parents' reaction is worse than expected. Karpf recounts how "my mother [...] told me I was doing what Hitler hadn't managed to – finishing off the Jewish race" (97). It is following this event that the stigmata begin to appear. The stigmata thus also represent Karpf's break from her parents' rules and traditions and as such symbolize her newfound agency. In this moment, she is for the first time asserting her independence from them, questioning their fears of others and questioning her inherited legacy; she is rebelling against the separation of Jews and Gentiles, much as Christ did. Like Christ, she is taking on the role of an active agent. She refuses to allow her mother to equate Karpf's act of being with a man who is not Jewish to the Nazi extermination of the Jews. In fighting against this, she is fighting against her parents mode of transmitting the past, fighting against their use of the Holocaust as a cautionary fairy-tale. Her ability to identify with Christ in this moment gives her the strength to reevaluate her identity and allows her to understand that her story is different than that of her parents, for she can identify with the Holocaust, yet is not imbued solely with their victim status. Through the stigmata, she discovers her agency to question her parents' conception of the world and is able to establish an identity for herself that incorporates both her intense identification with the past and her realization that in her present-day life, she is not a victim. Yet by taking action and confronting her parents' views and confronting the silence that separates them, she is further alienated from the source of her strongest identification: her parents.

Much as Christ's stigmata tied him to a past suffering, Karpf's stigmata validates her feelings of suffering by giving a concrete, bodily form to the psychological suffering

she has lived through and validates the feelings she has felt growing up, feeling that the Holocaust was present. It allows her to accept that even if her suffering in no way compares to the suffering of her parents; it is real, caused by her heritage as a second-generation Holocaust survivor. But while her stigmata validate her identification, they also challenge her patterns of behavior, forcing her to distinguish between past suffering and current behavior. Her identification with Christ's agency finally allows Karpf to find a way to connect her identification to an identity; she comes to understand that she while she identifies with the past, the past need not hold her captive as it has up to this point in her life. Karpf finds the strength to begin to form her own identity apart from her parents and to understand that their fear of others does not need to be her fear. The fairy-tale of her childhood, which warned her of the dangers and evil lurking behind all corners, no longer has to be unequivocally accepted.

Yet, it must be noted that while the appearance of stigmata enables Karpf to reassess her identity and her identification with the past, the stigmata do not prove to be the solution to all of her problems. For the wound that formed the stigmata is displaced and transforms into a different symbol of suffering, namely the image of a tattooed number inscribed by the Nazis at concentration camps, representing "the radical objectification and dehumanization of Jewish prisoners" (McGlothlin 3). Karpf describes the process of inflicting the wound after her stigmata has disappeared:

They started off as modest dry patches of skin on the inside of my elbows. But my response was brutal: the venom which had been loosed on my hands was now vented on to the larger canvas of my arms. [...] I would tear at my arms until the blood ran and the carpet was stippled with skin. [...] After years of my scratching, a close friend asked whether the place on my inside forearm that I was repeatedly injuring wasn't the same place, indeed the very same arm, where my mother's concentration camp number was inked. (101-106)



I would argue that the switch from representing suffering through stigmata to the tattoo is significant because by doing so, Karpf no longer locates the site of suffering with the transcendent figure of Christ, but rather grounds her suffering historically. Through infliction of this wound, Karpf's identification with the past moves from a generalized identification with suffering, through the stigmata, to a specific identification with her mother's experienced suffering, through an embodiment of her mother's enduring physical symbol of suffering. Karpf's 'tattoo' grounds her body in her family's legacy of oppression.

While the stigmata helps Karpf establish her identity as separate from her parents, the appearance of her wound resembling her mother's concentration camp tattoo connects her back to her parents' suffering. Karpf makes clear that in the real world, there are no easy solutions; her identity is constantly in flux, for the horrors of the Holocaust continue to demand to be addressed and thus Karpf's newfound agency is only the beginning of the process of her discovery of how to live *with*, instead of *in*, the shadows of the past.

## CONCLUSION

In my thesis I set out to examine texts by three second-generation authors, namely Anne Duden, Margarethe von Trotta, and Anne Karpf, and study the processes of identification in the texts, specifically in regards to identification with the figure of Christ. In the introduction, several questions were posited, namely: How does one live in the shadow of the past? How does a strong sense of identification with the past affect an individual's development of identity? What images do second-generation authors employ to confront the shadow of their past? What can the image of Christ convey that words alone cannot?

I was amazed to discover how, despite varying storylines and textual features, all three texts showed vast similarities in regards to their use of the motif of Christ. While Duden uses her identification with Christ to untangle her emotions and rebel against societal silence, von Trotta constructs Marianne as an individual inspired by Christ's rebellion, whose identification with Christ gives her the strength to pursue drastic societal change. Karpf's use of stigmata deviates from Duden and von Trotta's primary focus on the crucifix, yet Karpf follows Duden and von Trotta by engaging with the rebellious nature of Christ and by using the imagery of Christ as the starting point for assessing her identity apart from that of her family. The use of the motif of Christ can then be said to serve the purpose of providing a common figure of identification, which serves as the prototype of a rebellious leader, who advocates radical social change. Gerhard Kaiser, in

his book *Christus im Spiegel der Dichtung*, describes the use of Christ in literature with the observation that “Jesus Christus ist [...] in der Durchkreuzung aller zeitgemäßen Normen, Erwartungen und Denkmuster - aktuell” (12). I would argue that it is the ability to read Christ as an historical, rebellious figure, rather than a theological figure, which makes him a desirable symbol to appropriate. Furthermore, within Anglo-European and American society, Christ is imbedded within our social collective, allowing for references to Christ in the texts to be immediately understood, even by individuals without an interest in Christ’s theology. Thus, the appeal in appropriating the image of Christ lies in the symbolism’s ability to convey a message without struggling to find the appropriate words. For example, Karpf’s attempt to explain her relationship to the Holocaust past would have been difficult to succinctly express through words, but through her use of the image of the stigmata, she is able to convey her struggle and desire in a way that is easily accessible and more effective.

Thus, the importance of this exploration lies not only in the contribution it provides to secondary literature on Duden, von Trotta, and Karpf, but also in its ability to demonstrate the importance of learning to read Christian imagery, which I would posit is vital, not only for our understanding of the works under review, but in general scholarship as well. Religious imagery has found its way into almost every aspect of life: it appears in literature, on TV, in advertisements, in political campaigns. Without the ability to interpret the imagery, we may overlook a vital aspect of what is being conveyed. For example, without Christian imagery in *Die Bleierne Zeit*, Marianne may be seen as a confused, misled adult and the father may simply be read as another stereotypically dominant patriarch. But through an analysis of the religious imagery in

the film, we discover a much richer story, filled with societal critique in regards to the continuation of National Socialist ideology. Likewise in “Der Übergang”, the narrator could easily have been read as a suffering victim; yet after an analysis of the religious imagery in the text, we come to see that the narrator is portrayed as an active participant in her suffering and should therefore not be viewed in this way.

Duden and von Trotta’s texts clearly emphasize the need for social change, either by refusing to adhere to normative silences or by actively addressing the silencing of the past through terrorist action. While Karpf’s quest to define her identity initially gets posited within the family structure, I would argue that her work transcends the boundaries of the familial in her address of the effects of the Holocaust on children of survivors. All three authors share the commonality of being dissatisfied with the way in which the legacy of the Holocaust has been handed down to them, and I would posit that their critique of society can be read as the response to the initial question posed: How does one live within the *shadows of the past*? The answer offered would seem to be that one does so poorly and with much strife! Their dissatisfaction with life is not based on the tainted history itself; rather, it is founded on the feeling that the shadows of the past continue to be ignored by their peers. The narrators of the texts find themselves isolated from their generation, despite the fact that their inner turmoil *should* be felt by all, for it is a shared history; everyone has a responsibility to confront their inherited legacies. Sigrid Weigel, in response to the 1985 scandal surrounding censorship of Fassbinder’s play *Der Müll, die Stadt und der Tod*, comments, “seit 1945 wiederholt sich eine immerwährende Konstellation: das Nichtsprechen mit dem Anderen, das Versäumnis eines Sprechens” (“Shylocks Wiederkehr” 7). It is this silence that Duden, von Trotta, and Karpf seek to

address. For Duden and von Trotta, it is the silence about Germany's guilt and its continuation of fascist ideals which they seek to address. For Karpf, it is the lack of discussion about what it means for her to be a second-generation Holocaust survivor amidst the constant discussion of her parents' struggles. Thus, all three authors struggle against silence and, fearing another *Versäumnis eines Sprechens*, attempt to force the reader out of their position of apathy, posing in turn the questions: Why are we not discussing the past? What are we afraid of discovering?

However, in analyzing the relationship between identification and identity, a split between the authors occurs. In Duden and von Trotta, a strong identification with the past is associated with the narrator's ability to form a strong, rebellious identity. They are not afraid of acknowledging their Nazi inheritance; rather, their awareness is precisely what allows them to address societal problems. While they are burdened with the guilt of the past, their guilt does not prevent them from taking action. Karpf, as an inheritor of victimization, does not experience the present moment in the same way. Her strong identification with the past hinders her ability to form an independent identity; the past weighs more heavily on her.

Thus, while Duden and von Trotta's appropriation of the image of Christ is able to give a voice to their desire for change, Karpf's appropriation of the image of Christ is able to give a voice to her desire for independence, but fails to adequately convey her feelings of suffering. Arguably, in a post-Holocaust world, all other images of suffering, including that of Christ, are superseded by the graphic representations of absolute anguish and torment experienced during the Holocaust, especially for the descendants of survivors. For Karpf, the suffering which her family experienced during the Holocaust

will always be the most significant element of her identity; no other icon of suffering could compare to the real-life horrors which have been passed down to her.

In reading these texts, one cannot help but wonder: *Can* the Holocaust be transcribed to the make-believe world of fairy-tales or are the conditions which led to the rise of terror perhaps, disturbingly, present? The apathy of society depicted in all three works is striking, and the authors seem to agree that our only defense against future terror is found in our willingness to confront the *shadows of the past*.

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